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A Story of Real Life in New York.

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"THE BAT OF THE BATTERY," "DICK
TALBOT IN NEW YORK," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST NIGHT.

GREAT Gotham twenty odd years ago! Not the marvelous metropolis that we know to-day, for the country was just recovering from the throes of a terrible civil war, and though the Northern giant had succeeded in getting his fingers fairly fixed upon the throat of the Southern athlete, and had strangled his antagonist, yet the wonderful flush times which did so much to build up the metropolis had but just set in.

Amusements were quick to feel the improvement in the times, and the theaters in particular prospered.

At the date of which we write the Old Bowery Theater—the popular east-side house now captured by the Germans and rechristened the Thalia—was in the hight of its glory.

"MY NAME IS ROE, RICHARD ROE. WHETHER IT IS MY TRUE NAME OR NOT IS NO ONE'S BUSINESS."

The Actor Detective.

It was essentially a home theater, and probably numbered among its audience more regular patrons than any other place of amusement in the city; so the actors and the audience were like old friends, and warm was the greeting with which the prominent members of the company were welcomed when they made their bow upon the boards.

It was a pleasant August evening, the first night of a new season, and a tremendous audience had assembled to welcome the old favorites, and pass judgment upon the new members of the company.

The opening play was the well-known Indian drama entitled *Nick of the Woods*, and the veteran actor, who for so many years toured the country, thrilling all hearts with his marvelous impersonation of the dread avenger, the brain-crazed Reginald—who had suffered so fearfully at the hands of the ruthless red-men—was to appear as the hero of the play.

But, after this “celebrated tragedian,” public interest was centered upon two new-comers who were to enact prominent parts in the play.

One was a gentleman whose name, theatrically, was Edmund Keene; we say *theatrically*, for so many of the players adopt false names when upon the boards, that oftentimes it is no easy matter for the best judges to decide whether the appellation is real or assumed.

Keene was a fine-looking fellow of about eight-and-twenty, muscularly built, with dark brown eyes, and hair of the same hue, which curled in little crispy ringlets all over his well-shaped head.

His features were regular and pleasing, and he had the peculiar air about him which plainly showed that he was a gentleman, both by birth and breeding.

As an actor he had suddenly bounded into prominence, in the West, and having made his appearance in the metropolis armed with high commendations from the Western critics, he had no difficulty in securing an “opening” in New York.

The character he was to assume was Roland Forrester, as the young hero of the play is termed.

The other new-comer was a lady.

“Miss Estelle” was the name heralded upon the bills, but whether that was her first or last name was a puzzle.

It was not customary for actresses to play under their first names only, and yet Estelle did not seem to be a patronym.

In person the actress was rarely beautiful. She was tall and queenly in figure, with the loveliest face, pure red and white—peachlike, as a poet would describe it—magnificent hair, pure gold in hue and as luxuriant as the tresses of Lady Godiva, the heroine of the famous ride through the town of Coventry.

There seemed to be something of a mystery about the girl.

She was young, not yet out of her teens. She was reserved, and though she treated every one with whom she came in contact with the most ladylike politeness, yet by her manner she did not encourage close acquaintanceship.

Actors and actresses as a class, are the most genial people in the world. Their peculiar life tends to break down the rules of etiquette, and it does not usually take them long to get on good terms with each other, even when thrown together as utter strangers.

But there was something about this girl which warned them immediately that she was not of their class. She seemed to understand her business, though, and rehearsed like an old stager.

She was to assume the character of Edith Forrester, the persecuted heroine of the play, a part which does not call for any great amount of skill, not much acting being required in the role. About all the lady who represents it can do is to look as pretty and interesting as possible, and speak the rather insipid lines of the character with as much feeling as can be thrown into them.

Miss Estelle was also from the West, but was not disposed to be communicative in regard to the theaters in which she had played, and the rest of the company—actors in such matters are very quick to draw conclusions—soon formed the opinion that she was, comparatively speaking, a novice, and had not been long used to the glare of the footlights.

The call of “last music” had been made, and all those engaged in the opening of the play were in position upon the stage.

The curtain rises upon a pretty picture; the adventuring pilgrims, headed by Roland and Edith Forrester, are preparing to resume their march, after resting for the night.

The Forresters stand in the center of the stage, while the emigrants are grouped around them.

The orchestra was struggling bravely with the last “bars” of the overture.

The stern command of the stage-manager had been given, “Clear the stage!” and all was in readiness for the rising of the curtain.

Miss Estelle stood leaning upon the arm of Keene, and as the young actor gazed down upon the upturned face he thought he had never looked upon a more beautiful one.

“She is as fair as an angel,” he muttered to himself in admiration.

“If I had not sworn to devote my life to the accomplishment of one great purpose, I could find it in my heart to attempt to win such an angel-like girl as this fair creature,” he continued to muse.

Then, suddenly, the fair hand of the girl, which rested so confidently upon his arm, began to tremble, and a worried, anxious look came into her beautiful eyes.

“What is the matter—are you ill?” Keene asked; he had not exchanged ten words with the lady, except in the way of business, but there is a subtle freemasonry about stage-players which does away with all ceremony, and makes acquaintances of half an hour’s standing seem like old friends.

“No, I am not ill, but I am so frightened!” The confession was made almost before the girl was aware of what she was saying.

“Frightened!” The avowal was so unexpected that the young actor did not know what to make of it, and the expression in the beautiful eyes bore a strange resemblance to the terrified look which beams from the orbs of a hunted animal.

“Yes; my tongue seems to cleave to the roof of my mouth. I feel that I shall not be able to utter a sound when the curtain goes up and it is time for me to speak.”

The actor understood it now.

It was a genuine case of stage-fright, as the peculiar sensation is termed when the performer stands upon the stage like one in a maze, unable to articulate a word or even to move, and it is one of the stage traditions that, sooner or later, all who dare the glare of the footlights, will feel the baleful paralysis.

“Oh, is it not terrible?” the girl continued, in tremulous tones. “And I had made up my mind to be so brave, too. I felt so sure of success, though this is the first time I ever dared to test the gift which good judges have assured me I possess.”

“Have you never acted before, then?”

“No; this is my first appearance in public, although I have acted in amateur performances; but I have been studying under Madame Mikella for nearly a year. It was she who procured me this engagement, and she assured me that I could not possibly fail.”

“That woman would not hesitate to assure anybody anything provided she got her money for her lessons all right!” the actor exclaimed, indignantly.

“It will be so terrible for me to fail,” the maiden said, in tearful accents, “for I have exhausted my means and know not what to do. I am pursued, too, by an unrelenting enemy, who follows me with a vindictiveness for which I cannot account, as I am not aware of ever injuring a fellow-creature in my life.”

It was clear the suspicion of mystery about the girl was correct, but Keene paid no attention to that at present. His mission now was to revive the fainting spirits of the novice.

“Don’t give way to it,” he counseled. “This is no worse than playing at an amateur performance. It is like breaking the ice of a cold winter’s morning to wash your face. One dip and it is all over. Don’t think of the audience at all—don’t look at them; keep your eyes on me and speak out just as if you were in an empty theater. I know every line of your part and can prompt you.”

The curtain-bell sounded.

CHAPTER II.

JUDGE ANDY.

TINKLE! tinkle!

The moment the signal came for the curtain to rise the noise and confusion in the auditorium and passages began to vanish.

No more the shrill yell of one urchin greeting another from the opposite side of the gallery—“Hey, Mickey!” was heard.

There were a few shouts of “Down in front!” “Take your hats off!” and others of like import, but as the orchestra began the opening music the audience quieted down.

Up went the curtain, and when it was discovered that the two strangers—the fact of whose appearance had created considerable talk—were on the stage, the audience, with that generosity so common to the patrons of the Bowery theaters, greeted them with a warm burst of applause.

When this subsided, Keene, as Forrester, began his invocation to his companions.

The young actor, to an excellent stage presence, added the charm of an almost perfect voice, and his articulation was so distinct that every word he uttered could be heard in every part of the theater, and the impression he made was so good that, at the close of his speech, he was greeted with a round of applause.

He had made what is technically called “a hit.”

“Now, see how easy it is to please them,” Keene said, taking advantage of the burst of applause to speak an encouraging word to the girl, who was trembling in every limb.

“Oh, it is easy enough for you,” she replied, “but I feel that I shall not be able to utter a sound.”

“Nonsense! The round is about over; open your mouth and don’t be afraid; no one will eat you; go it!”

For the life of her the girl could not tell how it was—whether due to her companion’s encouraging words or to the warm pressure of his hand; or to some subtle instinct which revealed to her that she had a true friend in her newly-made acquaintance, but before she knew it she was repeating, parrot like, the lines of her part.

She was gifted with a beautiful voice, and though she was delivering the words with very little feeling, yet her voice and magnificent stage-presence carried her through, and she made an excellent impression, so much so that at the close of her speech a ripple of applause followed.

“You’re all right—courage,” Keene exclaimed quickly, in an undertone.

By her resolute effort she had conquered her stage-fright, and was enabled to go on.

As we have said, the impression she produced was an excellent one, and the manager of the theater, who sat with a party of friends in his box on the left-hand side of the theater, looked delighted.

Billy Freehigh—as the manager was called—was a decided character.

In person, he was a short, thick-set gentleman decidedly inclined to fatness, with a very red face, flanked by a short, bushy beard.

He was not a professional, but a “rank outsider,” as a sporting-man would say, and all the knowledge he had of theaters had been picked up while he was serving as bartender in the beer-saloon next door. But, in some mysterious way, he had found capital to back him, and for a couple of seasons had controlled the destinies of “the Old Drury,”—as the ancient temple of the drama of which we write is often termed.

He had not been particularly successful nor unsuccessful, having had sense enough to get some old-time actors to fill the positions of stage and acting managers, and, thanks to their counsel, which he was generally wise enough to follow, he managed to get along.

With Freehigh in the box were three gentlemen who are destined to play quite prominent parts in our tale; so we will describe them.

A planet and two satellites, so to speak.

The planet was a tall, portly, middle-aged gentleman, magnificently dressed, resplendent with jewelry and diamonds, yet with a bull-dog like face. His brows retreated, his chin protruded, his nose was a pug, and he had a jaw which would not have been out of place on a baboon.

And yet this big, burly fellow, with his coarse ways, which all his fine clothes could not cover up, was a great man on the East side of the metropolis, for he was a “leading politician,” a police justice—(Heaven save the mark!) a man with a powerful “pull,” to use the vernacular, and to the world at large he was known as Judge Anaconda Fitzgerald.

The given name was rather an odd one, but the father who bestowed it had been a queer genius, an eccentric junk-dealer; a little touched in the upper story, so it was supposed; but for all that he had wit enough to make money, and sense enough to hold on to it.

He was an illiterate man, but had a fondness for using big words, without caring much whether he applied them correctly or not.

Anaconda had struck him as being as fine a word as he had ever heard, and when there came a son and heir to his fortunes, he had bestowed the appellation upon him, despite the remonstrances of his wife, who declared it was more like the name of a heathen than a Christian.

The boy had been a pretty wild customer and had given his sire many moments of uneasiness while growing to manhood, and the old man had often predicted that “Andy,” as he always termed him, would come to the gallows at last.

When he grew to man’s estate he, like the rest of the “tough boys” of the day, became a member of the Fire Department, and from running with “der machine” he got into politics and in time became an alderman.

The wild life of the volunteer fireman acted as a sort of safety-valve, and by the time the old man shuffled off this mortal coil, Andy had sown his wild oats and settled down.

Thanks to the backing afforded by his father’s money—for the old junkman left over fifty thousand dollars behind him—a good-sized fortune in the day of which we write, when millionaires were not to be elbowed by the dozen on Broadway—Andy made rapid progress.

Politics paid him, as it invariably pays every man who is shrewd, unscrupulous and careful not to be found out.

So much so that he was not obliged to depend upon anything else, and as he was wise enough to follow the fortunes of the ruling party in the city, step by step he rose, until, at last, he was made a police justice, and now sat upon the bench in the Egyptian pile known as “The Tombs,” the city prison—one of the sights of the great metropolis.

“The judge” was a great admirer of the drama, and the Old Bowery was his favorite theater.

Indeed, it was shrewdly whispered that, in

reality, Judge Andy was the real manager of the place, Freehigh being only a dummy, for the judge had the run of the theater both before and behind the curtain, and took more interest in the place, seemingly, than the manager of the establishment; but the politician was careful to disclaim all responsibility—which it was wisely argued was to avoid being mixed up in the affair in case the speculation was a failure.

The judge's companions were two well-known men about town.

The elder, a tall, thin, stooping man with iron gray hair, a Napoleonic mustache and imperial, and a shrewd, peaked look which instantly suggested a fox was Cornelius McCracken, the well-known criminal lawyer, reputed to be the keenest hand at a quibble who ever tried to befog a judge or bewilder a jury.

A man with a decidedly "scaly" reputation, and yet among the old heads of the bar it was universally admitted that McCracken was a great lawyer and had positive genius for perceiving at a glance the weak and strong points of a case.

But Corny was not a man to be depended upon. He loved liquor too well and was not often seen free from its influences; so, instead of occupying the position which his rare legal gifts entitled him to hold, he was content to make a living by defending petty rascals, and furnishing legal advice by means of which other counselors made both fame and money.

The third man of the three was the judge's confidential man of business, a little weasel-like fellow, with a smooth face and an oily manner, Michael O'Lynch by name.

The judge was impressed with the new actress and in his emphatic way told the manager that she "was a daisy"—an opinion in which his companions joined, as in duty bound.

"Where did she come from?" the politician inquired.

"Out West, somewhere. She's one of the pupils of Madame Mikella, who turns 'em out by the dozen to order, so my stage-manager says, Freehigh replied.

"The old woman talked to Buster—he is my stage-manager, you know—and he concluded to give her a trial. She's cheap; only asked ten dollars a week, while we gave Charlotte Pennie, who did the same business last season eighteen."

As the play proceeded the judge seemed to be more and more favorably impressed with the young lady.

"It's a mighty odd thing, boys," he remarked; "her face seems familiar to me, and yet I am pretty sure I never saw her before, and I can't for the life of me remember who she looks like."

"You'll have to be afther cultivating her acquaintance," the lawyer suggested, with a smile.

Corny spoke with a slight brogue, just enough to indicate the land of his birth.

"Yes; and somehow I've a presentiment that she is going to be pretty well mixed up with my future life," the judge rejoined gravely.

The act came to an end and the manager went on the stage to compliment the stage-manager upon the smoothness of the performance.

"Now, then, I want some points from you, Corny!" the judge exclaimed, when the three were alone.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF GERALD FITZGERALD.

"FIRE away, me jewel; it's meself that can't be afther giving them to you, the lawyer replied.

"You know I told you that Mickey was away on important business, and that, when he returned the chances were I would have a job for you?"

"Yis; I remember the circumstance."

"You've known me a long time, Corny, and are pretty well acquainted with my family affairs."

"True for ye, and wid the family affairs of yer father afore ye."

"Do you remember my father's brother, Gerald Fitzgerald?"

"Faith an' I do, and it's a moighty foine gentleman he was, too. Shure! he did his best to live up to the illigant name he had, but he was as wild as a hawk."

"Yes; he and my father didn't get on together at all. My old man was a money-grubber, but my uncle was one of the boys. If you remember, he disappeared from New York about thirty years ago, and no word ever came from him."

"Yis, yis, I remember it well enough. He got into a scrape wid being too free wid an illigant little pistol he carried, and went off between two days to kape the law from laying him by the heels."

"He fled to Texas, went out to the frontier, became an Indian trader, and died three months ago, leaving a fortune estimated to be somewhere around five million of dollars."

The old lawyer opened his eyes wide in wonder.

"Five millions! bedad! that's a nate little fortune!"

"Yes, and his estate is worth all that. I happened just by accident to see his death-notice in a Texas paper, which by some error of the let-

ter-carrier found its way to my office. The similarity of the name to that of my uncle, who has not been heard of for many years, attracted my attention, and I resolved to look into the matter, particularly as the notice stated that he had left an estate supposed to be worth between five and six millions. So, just for a flyer, I started Mickey off to Texas to look into the matter."

"It was wu'th it bedad!" the lawyer declared.

Mickey returned this afternoon, and he has learned all the particulars of the affair. This man who died was my uncle—there isn't the least doubt of it, and the fact can be easily proven. He left a colossal fortune, fully five millions according to the best authorities, and there is a chance that a man about my size can get hold of the handling of the money."

"Upon me wourd, judge, if ye do, ye'r not the man I take you to be if some of the money doesn't stick to your fingers."

"That is my calculation exactly! But just listen to the curious way in which the affair is mixed: Twenty-five years ago—that is, just about five years after he fled from New York—my uncle was married. His bride was a French-English girl—a beauty according to all accounts—named Lucretia Esperance. The pair only lived together for about three years, during which time a son was born; then they separated.

"The marriage was not a happy one, for, according to all accounts, the two quarreled almost from the beginning. Fitzgerald had a high temper and was not a pleasant man to get along with, and it would seem that his wife was equally ill-tempered. They had a violent quarrel one night. Fitzgerald had been drinking, lost his temper, and with a powerful blow knocked his wife down. She arose to her feet perfectly crazy with rage, pulled a revolver and promptly shot him. He fell like a log. She believed she had killed him, and, taking her child, fled, and no one has ever heard a word of her since. Whether she and the child are alive or dead is a mystery."

"Oh, they're alive, both of them; they always are in these cases," the lawyer interposed.

"If there hadn't been any money left, maybe they would have died, but the five million will kape them alive."

"That's mystery number one."

"And heir number one."

"Yes; well, Fitzgerald recovered from his wound, and after about three years married again, but whether he ever took the trouble to get a divorce from his first wife or not, it was impossible for Mickey to discover. Of course everybody supposed he had, but Mickey was not able to find any proof of it, so there is some doubt about the matter."

"The second wife was named Elenora Pindexter, and she was a Southern girl, from Louisiana.

"By this second wife he had one child—a daughter. She was not able to get along with him any better than the first wife, but she didn't try any pistol business upon him. She got along as well as she could, for three years, and then she quietly ran away, and whether she is alive or dead no one knows."

"Upon me wourd the affair is finely mixed," McCracken remarked, with a chuckle. To his legal mind the case presented fine possibilities.

"Mark! two wives—the legal status of both uncertain—two children, and a doubt as to whether they are in existence or not."

"They're alive, both of them, I'd stake a fortune upon it!" the lawyer asserted.

"The boy would be about twenty-five and the girl somewhere around twenty. The first is named Marmaduke Esperance Fitzgerald, and the second, Geraldine Fitzgerald."

"And now comes another strange circumstance connected with the affair. Fitzgerald's death was somewhat sudden, yet he had ample time to arrange his worldly affairs, and when the doctor who attended him took it upon himself to inform the sick man that his death was only a question of time, and advised him to put his house in order, he replied that all necessary arrangements were made—that his will was in the hands of his lawyer, and there would not be any trouble in regard to the disposal of his fortune."

"Well, that simplifies matters, wonderfully," McCracken decided, with a sagacious shake of the head.

"Yes, but now comes another twist in the matter. Fitzgerald's lawyer, an eccentric old Texan known as General Joe Yellowbird, started, about two months before Fitzgerald was taken sick, on an extensive tour, going first to California and from there to India, and then he intended to return via England, and his calculation upon starting was that the trip would take him about a year. The will is in the general's possession, and no one has the slightest idea where it is deposited. The general's partner, another eccentric known as Colonel Baldy Jones, was 'got at' by Mickey, who had instructions from me to spare no expense in the matter, and he, in strict confidence, said there wasn't the least doubt that the will was in existence and had been put away by the general in some secure

place, but he declared he had not the remotest idea of where it was.

"He was aware of the contents of the will, for he had been present when it was drawn out; and for a consideration—Mickey paid the old blaggard,"—the judge would drop into the fire-boy talk once in awhile—"a hundred dollars for the information—he let out that the will was extremely short, and bequeathed all the property, without any conditions, whatever, to his daughter, Geraldine Fitzgerald, child of his second wife, Elenora Pindexter."

"And the executors?" shrewdly inquired the lawyer.

"General Yellowbird and the landlord of the United States Hotel at Corpus Christi—a German, named Adam Bramburg, one of Fitzgerald's boon companions. The hotel at Corpus Christi was Fitzgerald's headquarters whenever he came in from the frontier."

"And the property is all in Texas?" the old lawyer asked, with an ominous shake of the head.

"It is."

"It will be the devil's own job, then, to get it out of the hands of the lawyers, if they choose to make a stake by holding onto it."

"If they take half for their trouble the rest is worth fighting for. Now, with the exception of these two children, I am the nearest—and, in fact, as far as I know, the only heir to the dead man, for my father and uncle were the sons of an only child, and I haven't a relative in the world, to my knowledge."

"The will may not exist, for it is strange that it should be put away so carefully that it cannot be found. Without the will it is a question whether the girl can inherit anything or not, for if my uncle chose to marry her mother without taking the trouble to procure a divorce from his first wife, and with his recklessness it is more than likely that he did not trouble his head about the matter, then she is illegitimate, and has no claim. In that case the boy would come to the front, and he might have some trouble in proving that he is the child the French wife carried away, unless she is living, to testify to his identity."

"Now what do you think of my chances for the money?"

"Mighty good!" the lawyer replied, promptly. "Upon me wourd! I'd be glad to take such a case for a share of the spoils."

"It's yours, old fellow; go in and win!"

"The first thing is to find these two heirs; and when that is done you can buy the man off, and marry the girl," he suggested, jocosely.

"That's a good idea if you are joking," the judge assented. "If she was as ugly as a blackamoor, I think the five millions would induce me to consent to the match, although I admit I am a little gone on this daisy of an actress."

The tinkle of the curtain-bell again sounded.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNKNOWN.

"OH, mebbe the other girl is as good looking as this one. You can't tell until you find her, you know," McCracken suggested.

"Well, it won't do any harm to get up a flirtation with this one, anyway," was the judge's light rejoinder.

Up went the curtain and again the play proceeded.

During the drama the lovers, Roland and Edith Forrester are almost constantly together, and so there were plenty of opportunities for Keene and the young actress to get well acquainted.

The kindness shown her by the young man had melted the icy reserve with which she had enshrouded herself and she became communicative.

During the "waits," when they were not actively engaged upon the stage, they had ample time for conversation, and the girl seized upon the first opportunity to express her gratitude for the service the young man had rendered her.

"If I ever succeed in making anything as an actress I shall always feel that I owe my success to you," she said.

"Without your aid to-night I know I should have made a most terrible failure. I should not have been able to open my mouth; I was so frightened that for a moment I thought I would faint."

"It was a genuine case of stage fright. Almost every one who dares the footlights is certain to have an attack sooner or later, and old stagers say that the novice who does not experience the awful sensation will never make a success upon the boards."

"If the success depends upon the strength of the attack then I ought to be very successful," she remarked with a charming smile, "for I feel quite sure that no one could ever have been more panic-stricken than I was."

"It was a bold attempt for a novice to essay so prominent a part," the young actor observed. "There were ladies in the ballet here and playing small parts who have been on the stage for a year or two who would no more have dared to make the attempt you have to-night than they would think of flying up to the moon."

"I was desperate," the girl replied. "All

The Actor Detective.

avenues by means of which I could hope to gain an honest living seemed closed against me except this one.

"I attempted to sew but I was not sufficiently strong to endure the hardships of such a life," the girl said in her simple, innocent way. "And just as I was about despairing I met Madame Mikella."

"She had a room in the same house where I resided and in the kindness of her heart took pity upon me."

"By her advice I resolved to adopt a stage life, for she assured me I had natural gifts which would be certain to insure success."

"The madame is a good judge," the young man remarked. "She is an old actress herself and knows pretty well what qualifications are essential to a public career. Nearly all of her pupils whom she believes in make a success, but as she has often told me, the people who are least qualified to succeed on the stage are the ones who are willing to pay the highest."

"Of course, it is her business to teach the art of acting, but as she is honest enough to own to those who like myself are in the ring and understand the ropes, acting is something that cannot be really taught. It can only come from experience, being in that respect just like swimming and skating."

"All the teaching in the world will not make a man a swimmer or learn him how to stand upon his skates; actual practice alone will answer."

"There are plenty of idiots, though, ready to pay for the privilege of learning how to act, and as the madame must make a living somehow, and as she is getting too old to act, she can hardly be blamed for taking the money so freely tendered her."

"She was very kind to me indeed, for I was sadly disheartened and had begun to despair when I chanced to make her acquaintance," the girl remarked.

"My money was nearly exhausted, and I did not know what I should do, when Madame Mikella appeared to me like a guardian angel."

"She declared I had talent and volunteered to instruct me. Nay, more, she procured me sewing from the costumer of one of the Broadway theaters, so I was able to support myself while studying."

"Then, after I had become sufficiently advanced, she managed to arrange for me to appear at some amateur entertainments so that I would become accustomed to appearing in public, and then she procured me this engagement, but I fear all her kindness would not have been of any avail if it had not been for your timely encouragement to-night."

"Oh, don't mention it!" the actor exclaimed, lightly. "I only did what any man ought to have done. I remember what a hard time I had when I began. I hadn't any one to advise me, and at first it was a terrible up-hill road."

"All my life has been that way ever since I can remember," the girl said, with mournful cadence.

"Left an orphan, I was forced to fight life's battle alone and unaided. It was a terribly unequal struggle, and just as I felt I should sink down exhausted my steps were happily directed into this new life."

"Then, too, there is a mystery connected with my family. My mother was always in dread of a bitter foe, who, she declared, would surely do her harm."

The young man listened in wonder to this strange tale.

"What was he like?" he asked.

"I can hardly answer that question, for my mother was strangely reserved, but as far as I can make out, he was a tall, dark young man, with a smooth, boyish-looking face, seemingly a foreigner."

"This is the strangest affair that ever came to my knowledge," Keene declared.

Just at this moment they were summoned to the stage, and the conversation came to an end.

In the scene which ensued Keene had occasion to come quite close to the footlights, and as he did so he happened to glance into the front of the house.

His attention was directed to the private boxes on the left of the house, mainly because he happened to see the manager in one of the boxes, the one nearest to the stage; but judge of his astonishment when in the neighboring box he beheld a tall, smoothly-shaven young man with a foreign look, the very counterpart of the one described by the girl.

So astounded was the young actor by this unexpected discovery that for a moment he forgot where he was and hesitated in taking up his cue when it was given him.

Of course it might only be a chance resemblance, but for all that Keene had taken it into his head that the man in the box was the very identical one whom the girl had described.

The actor didn't like the fellow's looks and mentally set him down for a bad egg, and if he could have seen the movements of the man in the interval between the first and second acts he would have been satisfied his suspicion was correct.

During the whole of the first act the stranger had remained in the back of the box, secluding

himself so he could not be seen either by the audience or by the people upon the stage, but when the act-drop descended and Freehigh rose to excuse himself, as he was going upon the stage, his utterance of the judge's name came to the ears of the unknown.

Immediately he became curious.

Only a thin wooden partition separated the two apartments.

Drawing a gimlet from his pocket, he cautiously made a hole in the partition, and by applying either eye or ear he could both see and hear all that transpired in the other apartment.

And so not a word of the judge's story escaped him.

A strange look came over his face as he settled back in his place as the curtain rose again on the play.

"So it cannot be avoided," he murmured, as he listlessly watched the movements of the actors upon the stage. "The deed must be done—as well now as at any other time."

And then from his hip-pocket he drew a revolver, a large one, navy size, and cocking it, leaned forward, his gaze intently fixed upon Miss Estelle, who at this moment came upon the stage.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT.

THERE was murder in the man's face; no one could have doubted that if favored with a good view of his countenance.

And it was just at this point that the attention of the young actor was directed to the man.

Keene did not catch sight of the revolver, though, for the stranger masked the weapon with his knee so that it could not be seen.

"By Jove!" the actor muttered to himself, "that fellow looks ugly. He looks as if he meant mischief. It wouldn't be a bad idea to call the girl's attention to him."

Acting on this impulse on the first occasion when the business of the stage did not require their immediate attention, Keene told the lady of the discovery which he had made.

"Have you become accustomed to the theater so as to be able distinguish the people in the front of the house?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I am quite far-sighted, and I am all over my nervousness," she replied.

"Have you noticed a gentleman in the second box on the left hand—Manager Freehigh and some of his friends are in the first box—the one nearest to the stage?"

"Yes, I noticed that there was a gentleman there, but he sat so far back in the box that I was not able to distinguish him."

"He has moved to the front now, although from the peculiar way in which he is skulking behind the curtains, it looks as if he was not desirous of being seen. I got a pretty good view of him a moment ago, though, and the thought at once occurred to me that he exactly resembles the man whom you described to me as having caused you annoyance."

A cloud passed over the face of the young actress, and it was plain she was troubled by the apprehension that the man in the box and the unknown who seemingly bore her family no good-will were one and the same.

"I am not sure I should be able to recognize him," she remarked. "For all I have to guide me is my mother's vague description."

"That isn't much," the actor responded.

"Take a look at him, but do not allow him to see that you recognize him—if he is the man—or suspect that you are trying to identify him."

"Glance around the house carelessly, as though you had no particular object in so doing."

The girl obeyed the instructions, and as the young man in the box at that moment had allowed his attention to be occupied by the actors in the foreground, she was able to get a good view of his face without his suspecting it.

"He fully answers the description," she said, "and I feel equally sure that his presence here bodes no good to me."

The troubled look upon the face of the girl appealed strongly to the sympathies of Keene.

"I should not allow myself to worry about that," he remarked.

"But his appearance, my mother said, has always seemed to be the herald of some mischief," she said.

"It cannot be the result of accident only, but I fear of dread design."

"If you have no objection I will look into the matter, and try to ascertain something about this mysterious personage," the young actor said, in the easy, careless way, which is so reassuring to the timid heart. "I think there is the making of a fine detective officer in me, and this will be a good opportunity to try my powers," he continued, in a jesting sort of way.

"This fellow looks brigandish enough to be a first class scoundrel, and I really think I should enjoy getting upon his trail, as a Western man would say."

"And would you take such trouble on my behalf, an utter stranger to you?" the actress asked, a grateful look in her beautiful eyes.

"Oh, no, not a stranger now, you know," he rejoined. "We have been formally introduced, have faced the footlights together, and for my part I feel as if you were an old friend; friendship ripens quickly sometimes, you know."

"Yes, yes, it is true; you do not seem like a stranger to me," the girl remarked.

At this point the necessities of the drama called them to action again, and the conversation ended.

On went the drama, and soon the end of the act came.

The whites were surprised by the red-skinned Shawnees, led by their great chief, Wenonga, and the pale-faced renegades, the deadly enemies of the Forresters.

Roland—Keene—had been pinioned from behind by a couple of stalwart supernumeraries, gorgeously got up as aborigines, Edith—Miss Estelle—had been grasped by the conquering Dick Braxley and swung into the corner of the stage, and at this moment, just before the appearance of Nick of the Woods in his fiery canoe, shooting the rapids, hastening to the rescue of the captive whites, just as the noise subsided to allow the renegade to speak, the sharp crack of a revolver rung through the theater.

The young actress gave utterance to a shrill scream.

"Oh, heavens! I am shot!" she cried, and then she sunk fainting into the arms of the actor who played the part of the chief renegade.

The smoke curling from the private box seemed to indicate from whence the shot had come, and then Keene, too, had happened to have his eyes upon the young man in the box, and though the theater was quite dark, the lights being all turned down to give due effect to the tableau which was to end the act, and the stranger had retired to the rear of the box, yet the young actor had seen the flash of the powder when the pistol was discharged.

He was prompt to act.

With a vigorous effort he threw aside the make-believe Indians who were holding him captive, and dashed across the stage to the box.

"The man who fired the shot is in the next box," he exclaimed to the manager and his party.

Clear as a bell the voice of the young actor rung through the house, and the audience suddenly woke to the knowledge that while they had been enjoying the representation of the mimic tragedy, a real one had been enacted in their presence.

Immediately a great shout arose.

As one man the immense audience sprung to their feet and roared out to secure the murderer.

But the inmate of the box had disappeared.

If he had fired the pistol—and there did not seem to be any doubt about the matter, for he was the only occupant of the box, and the shot had certainly come from there—he had made his escape the moment he discharged the weapon.

But how had the fellow got off?

The passage from the box led right through the lobby of the theater, and that was filled with sight-seers, so it was impossible for any one to pass through without forcing a way through the crowd.

And just as everybody was beginning to gape at his neighbor and frame the question, Where is he? a shout arose from the stage—from behind the scene, and then two stalwart stage-carpenters in their shirt-sleeves came dragging out from between the wings, as the side-scenes of the stage are called, the pale-faced foreign-looking stranger who had sat in the box and was supposed to be the assassin.

He had passed by the private way, back of the manager's box, onto the stage, no doubt supposing that behind the scene all was confusion, and he would have no difficulty in making his way to the street.

His ignorance of the condition of affairs behind the scenes was at once made manifest by this movement, for there isn't any place on the face of the earth where a stranger will be more quickly spotted than behind the scenes of a well-regulated theater.

It is impossible for a stranger to take a step without encountering some one who knows right well that he hasn't any business there.

The stage-carpenters had accosted the young man before they were fully aware of what had taken place, for he had no sooner made his appearance through the private door than they stopped him.

It was a mystery to them how he had managed to come through, for the door was fastened by a spring-latch to which only the manager, the gasman, and janitor of the house had keys.

The door had not been left ajar either, for the two men who were near the door, distinctly heard the latch spring in the lock before the door opened.

The moment the young man appeared, they barred his passage, and then, when the cry of murder came from the stage, suspecting he had something to do with it, they seized him despite his indignant protestations.

"That is him! that is the man who fired the

The Actor Detective.

"shot!" Keene cried the instant he caught sight of the fellow struggling in the grasp of the stagehands.

"No such thing! this in an outrage! unhand me, you miserable scoundrels!" cried the young man, in high indignation.

"Lynch him, lynch him!" came in a stentorian yell from the throats of the audience.

Possibly this method of doing justice would have been acted upon, so excited were the witnesses of the scene, had not a couple of burly policemen made their appearance upon the stage at this instant, leaping down from the boxes and securing the accused.

"All right, gentlemen; we'll take care of the scoundrel!" yelled one of them at the top of his lungs, and the audience responded with a yell which seemed almost powerful enough to lift the roof.

Away went the officers and their prisoner through the back door of the theater.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JUDGE'S LITTLE GAME.

WHILE the prisoner was being secured, the ladies of the company had flocked to the assistance of the wounded girl, and by the time the would-be assassin was removed, the discovery was made that the design of the assailant had not been accomplished.

That he intended to take her life was plain, but he had not succeeded in carrying out his intention, for his aim had not been equal to his malice.

The ball had struck Miss Estelle in the shoulder—it had evidently been aimed straight for her heart—and had merely inflicted a slight flesh-wound.

A couple of doctors who chanced to be in the audience had clambered upon the stage, and one of them happening to have some court-plaster in his pocket, speedily dressed the wound, and then the young actress, suddenly recovering her courage, announced to the gray-mustached old stage-manager that she was able to go on with her part.

The delight of the audience was unbounded.

It was only once in a lifetime that the average theater-goer was treated to such an exhibition, a mimic tragedy, and one that only escaped by a hair's-breadth from being real upon the selfsame stage.

The play proceeded, and at its close Miss Estelle received a regular ovation.

Even the star of the night was eclipsed, a fact which that gentleman did not particularly admire, and as he confidentially informed the manager who called upon him in his dressing-room to congratulate him upon the successful manner in which everything had been carried out—

"It looks as if the young miss had a narrow escape, but women are deuced peculiar sometimes and are up to all sorts of tricks, especially these Western girls, and this may all be a put-up job to attract attention. The thing is sure to make her the talk of the town.

"You bet!" responded Billy Freehigh, emphatically.

He had been drinking pretty freely and had arrived at that delightful state of mind when everything looked lovely.

"It don't make a bit of difference whether it's a put-up job or not, it's bound to make the biggest racket of anything in the show business that has happened for the last ten years.

"I tell you what it is, old man, I'll bet you a thousand dollars to a cent that we won't be able to get the people in here to-morrow night. It may be an advertising dodge, but if it is, it's the biggest one I ever heerd of in all my born days."

The "star" gave a sniff of contempt.

Although he would share in the prosperity of the theater, for the salary consisted of a certain percentage of the receipts after the expenses of running the play-house were deducted, yet so envious was he of anything that looked as if it might detract from his fame, he would willingly have taken less money to be sure that his greatness as an actor drew the people into the house.

With a great flourish the manager had introduced Judge Andy to the young actress.

And although she would have gladly escaped the ordeal of receiving strangers, yet as Freehigh represented that they were influential patrons of the theater, besides being some of the leading citizens of the city, she could not very well escape the introductions.

So Judge Andy and a half a dozen other gentleman friends of the manager were presented to the lady.

All tendered their congratulations upon her lucky escape from the stranger's bullet, and she replied as briefly as possible.

She was not impressed by the appearance or manners of these "leading citizens."

Nearly all of them had been drinking freely, and most of them plainly showed the effects of the strong liquors which they had imbibed.

They were all "prominent men," as the manager had declared, but not particularly reputable ones for all that, and they fairly overwhelmed the girl with coarse compliments.

Judge Andy, in particular, did his best to make a favorable impression upon the lady.

He had been careful to instruct the manager to inform the girl that he was the judge who presided over the Tombs Police Court, and when he saw that the announcement did not seem to make any particular impression upon the girl, he went to the pains to explain to her what a great man he was.

"Probably you are not posted in regard to the court over which I preside," he remarked.

The actress confessed that she was not.

"It is the leading police court of the city," he explained.

"Your assailant will be arraigned there in the morning, and I will see that he is put through a course of sprouts in short order!" he exclaimed, in grandiloquent style.

"Some old enemy of yours, I presume," he continued, curious to learn why such a fierce attack had been made upon the girl.

"Indeed, sir, I do not know," the actress replied, hardly knowing what explanation to make.

"I have seen the man two or three times before, I think, but I really do not know aught of him, and if he is my enemy I cannot account for it, for I know no reason why he should be."

It was a very mysterious affair; all agreed as to that, but as the judge remarked:

"No doubt the examination to morrow will throw some light upon the matter, but you can depend upon the scoundrel being punished to the fullest extent of the law, for I will personally attend to the affair. You can depend upon that."

The actress, of course, thanked the judge in a befitting manner for his kindness, and bidding the rest of the intruders good-night, withdrew to the privacy of her dressing-room, a seven by nine apartment, which she shared with two other ladies.

When she was dressed for the street she proceeded to quit the theater, but, to her annoyance, in the back doorkeeper's room she encountered the manager and the judge.

Freehigh took the lady to one side, for there were half a dozen of the understrappers of the theater hanging around, and explained that the judge desired to do honor to her *début* upon the Old Bowery boards.

As Freehigh took pains to explain, the leading lady of the theater, "Miss" Matilda De Browne, had also been invited to make one of the party, and was outside in the carriage.

Miss Browne, who was a married lady, of forty, or thereabouts, with a large family of small children, had been for years a fixture on the Bowery side.

She had been almost brought up in the theater, and had risen from the ranks to her present position, having begun her career twenty odd years ago in the ballet.

All the regular customers of the Old Bowery admire "Miss" Browne.

All theatrical ladies are generally misses until they get old enough to be grandmothers.

It is one of the stage ideas that it adds to the attractiveness of a woman in public life to make the world at large believe she is heart whole and fancy free.

Everybody that knew anything at all about the Old Bowery, though, knew that the lady was not only married, but that the old, bald-headed, fat man who kept the main door of the theater was her liege lord and master.

The lady was not a great actress, by any manner of means, but she "made up well," that is, when arrayed for the stage, by the means of wigs, paints and powders, deftly applied, she appeared young and good-looking, possessed a wonderfully powerful voice, was always letter-perfect in her characters, and so had worked her way into the good graces of the public, and was a far greater favorite than she really deserved to be.

Miss Estelle had not been particularly impressed by either the manager or the judge, and if she had been, her own good sense would have told her that in her position it would be far better to decline than accept any such invitation.

And so she begged to be excused, much to the astonishment of the two men, who had not anticipated anything of the kind.

Freehigh attributed it to the timidity and bashfulness of the girl.

"She's only a novice, you know, and not used to this sort of thing," he explained to his companion. "The manager of the theater is a big thing in her eyes, to say nothing of a judge like yourself, and it isn't anything but natural for her to be abashed at the idea of a little supper with us."

"I'll get Browne to talk to her; she's an old stager, understands the ropes, and will know exactly how to get at this coy damsel."

So, turning to Miss Estelle, he requested her to wait a moment, as Miss Browne wished to speak with her.

The girl said, "Certainly," for she had not the slightest suspicion of the manager's little game.

Freehigh and the judge hurried to the carriage where Miss Browne was comfortably in-

stalled, and the manager in haste explained to the veteran actress what was required.

"I want you to go and talk to Miss Estelle," he said. "She's a new hand at this sort of thing, you know, and I suppose she don't understand what a big feather in her cap it is for her to be invited to take a feed with two such men as the judge and myself."

"Of course she isn't used to metropolitan ways; how can you expect the child to be?" observed the actress, descending from the coach.

"You can represent the matter to her in the proper light, though, Miss Browne," the judge remarked.

"Oh, yes, it takes women to deal with women, you know," the actress replied, with a self-satisfied shake of the head. "I don't wonder that she was abashed at the invitation, for it isn't often that a novice like this girl gets such a chance, right at the beginning, too; it's better to be born lucky than rich in this world."

Saying which she disappeared within the magic precincts of the back-door.

In truth, the old actress felt a little spiteful about the matter.

She understood that she had been invited to join the party merely to play propriety, and that if the men thought the girl would have come alone they would never have troubled their heads about her.

"Talent stands no show against a pretty face," she muttered.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INVITATION.

BUT the old actress had a kindly heart, and although she couldn't help feeling a little vexed when she reflected how easily the beautiful novice had succeeded in producing a favorable impression not only upon the audience (who are as fickle-minded as the Roman multitude of old, ever ready to fling up their caps and shout in honor of a new conqueror), but upon the two great men of the theater, the manager, and the money man, who keeps in the background but provides the funds.

In spite of the feeling of pique which she experienced, she had determined to advise the girl to the best of her ability.

"She's made the biggest impression and secured the best hold of any girl that ever stepped foot in this theater, since I've known anything about it, and if she is wise enough to play her cards as she ought to play them, she can have everything her own way while she stays in the building. She may put my nose out of joint, although I hardly think so, for this miss isn't strong enough to play my line, but I'll advise her to the best of my ability, all the same."

The old actress plunged at once into the subject when she came to the girl.

"Ain't you going to come with us, dear?" she asked.

"I would rather be excused," Estelle answered.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't; you don't understand it, I see. Let me tell you that you will be very foolish if you don't come."

"But I do not wish to go. I would rather go home; I am very tired and need rest."

"Nonsense! A glass of champagne and a few nice oysters will brace you up wonderfully!" persisted the old actress. "You will make a big mistake if you don't come. Why, there isn't a woman in the theater who wouldn't be glad of the chance; in fact, the best of them would be ready to jump out of their shoes with joy at the bare prospect of such an honor."

"Honor?" exclaimed Miss Estelle, rather doubtfully, and with just a little bit of a curl perceptible in her ripe, red under-lip.

"Yes, it is an honor, and you may rest assured of that. I tell you so, and I ought to know."

"Freehigh is the manager of the theater, the king over all of us slaves, for that is about what we are, inasmuch as our bread and butter depend upon him."

"If any one of us should happen to displease his high mightiness, he'd get rid of us in short order."

"Of course we've got our contracts for forty weeks and all that, but mighty little good they would be to us, with the theater made so unpleasant that there wouldn't be any living in it. And the judge is a bigger man than the manager, for Freehigh is only a figure-head—a dummy for Judge Andy."

"He's the real manager, and now that you have made a favorable impression upon him, you are a little idiot not to take advantage of it. It will insure your future success to accept his civilities."

"But I do not want to achieve success in that way," the girl replied, a spicie of indignation in her tones.

"If I cannot win the laurel crown of fame by my own exertions and by my own merits, I do not want to wear it."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" the old actress cried.

"That is the way all you novices talk."

"When you have been a few years in the business you will find out that the old saying,

"kissing goes by favor," is as true in this profession as any other.

"You can't make a hit on the stage without you get prominent parts to play, and you can't get the prominent parts unless you stand well with your manager."

"You may have all the talent in the world, but no one will ever know it unless you get a chance to display your genius."

"All that you say may be true—I've no doubt that it is, but for all that I do not care to accept such attentions at the hands of gentlemen who are almost utter strangers to me."

"If I cannot win success on my merits, independent of any personal favor, then I do not care to win at all."

"I admire your spirit, dear child, but you'll find you'll have a hard row to hoe before you get through."

"I cannot help it—I must act according to the dictates of my judgment."

"Then I must tell the gentlemen that you are firm in your refusal?"

"Yes."

"They'll be awfully vexed."

"I am sorry but cannot help it."

"It will make trouble for you," Miss Browne warned. "I know Judge Andy like a book, and he will never forgive you if you slight him to-night."

"I do not intend to slight the gentlemen, and I heartily regret that I cannot avail myself of his kind offer, but it is impossible."

"A willful woman will have her own way," the old actress remarked, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Your ideas are all right, but you will find that they will not pay."

"I shall be sorry if your words come true, but I must go by my own convictions."

"Very well, I'll report, and, dear, for your sake, I'll do my best to soften the matter down all I can," the old actress observed.

"I've taken quite a liking to you, my dear, you're such a kind of an innocent chick, not at all like the average young lady who tries her fortune upon the stage, and who, after she has trod the boards for a couple of days, knows enough—in her mind—to give points to the oldest professional."

"And, dear, you had better slip out behind me and hurry off home so as to be able to avoid further solicitation."

"As you have made up your mind there isn't the least use of your being bothered any more."

With a grateful heart the girl thanked the old actress, for there wasn't any mistake about the genuineness of the sympathy expressed by her, and said she would take her advice.

So when Miss Browne quitted the theater, Estelle slipped out behind her and walked quickly down the street while the actress advanced to the carriage in which the two men had ensconced themselves.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but Miss Estelle is too tired to go to-night, and begs that you will excuse her. In fact, I rather think she is afraid of the honor, for she is bashful and not used to hobnobbing with managers and judges."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" Judge Andy cried. "Tell her that we will not eat her—we are not cannibals. Try her again and see if you can persuade her."

"No use, she started for home. She's a shy bird, you see, and not used to such attentions."

The judge plainly showed his annoyance while Freehigh took the matter more easily. In fact it didn't concern him at all. It was the judge's idea from beginning to end.

"Well, jump in, Browne," the manager exclaimed. "The supper is ordered, and somebody's got to eat it, and if Miss Estelle hasn't sense enough to know when she's well off, it's no reason for the supper to spoil."

"Do you think I am going alone with you two horrid men?" the actress cried, with a little shrill cry of alarm.

"Oh, no, not if I know myself!"

And then just at this moment she caught sight of the "soubrette" of the theater emerging from the back door.

"Here's Polly!" she cried; "take her along. Come, Polly, and have some supper."

Miss Polly Weekly was the brisk young lady who played the "boys" and the smart maid-servants overflowing with impudence and pertness, and as she stood well in the opinion of the august two who controlled the destinies of the Old Bowery, no objection was made by them to Miss Browne's proposal.

Of course the young lady protested that she wasn't dressed fitly—she looked like a fright, and all that, but champagne and oysters were too potent a spell for her to overcome, and so she gladly got into the carriage, and the party were driven off.

Estelle had made good her escape.

Her boarding-place was but a short distance from the theater, being situated on the Bowery, a few doors below Grand street.

It was a well-known actor's boarding-house, very few except professionals ever enjoying the hospitalities of the mansion.

It had been customary for Estelle to reach the theater from her home by coming down the Bowery until she came to Canal street, then

turning into that broad thoroughfare, a single block brought her to Elizabeth street, in which the back door of the theater was situated.

But on this occasion she was in so much of a hurry to get away from the neighborhood of the theater, and so escape from the importunities of the supper-party, that she hurried on without taking particular notice of where she was going, and had crossed Canal street and entered upon the second block of Elizabeth before she knew it.

"It doesn't matter," she murmured; "I can go through the next street."

She was dressed plainly in dark clothes, and had nothing about her to attract attention with the exception of a small hand-bag which she carried, and which looked as though it might contain jewelry or other valuables.

She had no thought of danger until she encountered in the middle of the lonely block a rough-looking man who cast a covetous glance at the bag as he passed.

"I fear I did wrong to come through this lonesome street," she mused.

She was right in the surmise, for the evil-looking fellow turned abruptly in his course and stole silently after her, a movement which caused her to tremble with fear.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

ESTELLE'S breath came fast and hard.

She was sure she was not mistaken; the man who had leered at her with his evil eyes in passing, had turned and was following in her footsteps.

She quickened her pace, involuntarily, for it was done without thought.

The man increased his also, and was approaching so rapidly that it was plain she must soon be overtaken by him.

The street was deserted, the hour was late, close to midnight, and besides themselves there was not a soul in sight.

Just ahead of her, too, was a dark spot, and the girl's fears instinctively told her that when the gloom was reached the ruffian, for such the man clearly was, would attack her.

True, she might scream for help.

She was not very well acquainted with the great city, but she knew enough of it to be aware that the chances were great no one would pay any attention to her cries.

The man was so near her now that she fancied she could feel his hot breath upon her neck.

The attack came just exactly in the spot that she had anticipated.

The gloom was reached and the fellow laid his huge, dirty hand upon her shoulder and forcibly staid her progress.

"Wait a bit, missus," he said, in a thick and husky voice, which immediately betrayed that the man was somewhat under the influence of liquor.

"Take your hand from my shoulder, sir; how dare you?" exclaimed the young actress, spiritedly, pretending a courage which she was far from feeling.

"Oh, take it easy!" growled the man. "Don't go for to cut up rusty er it will be the worse for you. I only want to have a little talk with you, that's all."

"What do you wish to say?" Estelle asked, facing the ruffian with a courage which she had no idea she possessed.

"I'm a poor man, I am, down on my luck in the worst kind of way, and I thought, maybe, that a rich lady like you might be willing to give a poor man a trifle to help him along."

"I haven't anything, and I am not rich; my pocket-book is at home."

"Oh, yes; that's the story you rich 'uns tip a poor cove like me all the time," replied the man with a sneer.

"You allers swear that you ain't got a penny to yer name, even when you've got the price of a fortune in yer pockets."

"But I assure you, sir, I spoke the truth when I told you that I hadn't any money," the girl asserted.

"Even if I had my pocket-book with me the scanty sum of money which it contains would not help you much. I doubt if there is over a couple of dollars in it."

"Missus, I'm one of them blooming kind of men wot never turns up my nose at trifles. If I had two dollars I know where I could have a red-hot time on it afore morning, so hand over the mopus and I'll remember you in my prayers for a month," and the fellow grinned as though he fancied he had uttered an excellent jest.

"But I told you I hav'n't the money. I really hav'n't a single cent upon my person."

"W'ot have you got in this little bag?" and the fellow grinned in a horrible way as he touched the leather bag with his dirty fingers.

"No money!"

"Hain't you made a mistake about it? Hadn't you better let me open the little gimerack so as to be sure?" and he closed his brawny hand upon the bag as he spoke.

"I assure you that there isn't the least bit of money in the bag!" she exclaimed earnestly.

"Mebbe you've got some leetle bits of jewelry

into it—a pair of bracelets or diamond earrings, maybe," and the ruffian's mouth seemed fairly to water as he spoke of the valuables.

"There are a few trinkets in the shape of jewelry in the bag, but nothing of any value. Please let go of it."

And she clung stoutly to the article despite the threatening look which came over the face of the tramp.

"Say, you don't want to scream out like that if you know what is good for yourself!" he said threateningly.

"You jest let go of the bag; let me examine it and see for myself w'ot's inside."

"I'm a mighty good judge of jewelry, I am. I used to be in the business once."

"I'll try acids on 'em for to see whether they are the genuine gold or only plated, you know. I'll send 'em around to yer house to-morrow morning by the milkman; he's a pal of mine, he is."

"Why, do you know where I live?" Estelle asked, not knowing what to make of this strange affair.

"Oh, yes, I know all about ye; I'm an old pal of yours, but I s'pose I've grown out of your memory. Ta, ta, I'll see you later!"

And then with a violent wrench he tore the bag out of the girl's hand.

But the footpad was not destined to get away with his plunder slight as it was.

A manly figure had advanced cautiously up the street from the next corner, having evidently had his attention attracted by the two in conversation, and had managed his approach so well that he was within almost arm's length of the pair before either one of them had any idea that anybody was near.

"You scoundrel! give the lady her bag instantly," said a stern but melodious voice that Estelle to her joy instantly recognized.

The new-comer was Edmund Keene.

He had stopped at the saloon on the corner to take a glass of ale with a friend and after parting with him had noticed the female form up the street, and fancying it was no stranger to him had cautiously approached the group.

With an oath the ruffian turned and faced the new comer, and from the way in which he held onto the bag it was plain he hadn't any idea of giving it up.

"W'ot do you mean by interfering in business w'ot don't concern you?"

"Oh, but it does concern me," the actor replied. "Don't make any mistake about that. Give the lady her bag instantly, and take to your heels or it will be the worse for you."

"Go 'way, you whipper-snapper, or I'll make mince-meat outen you!" growled the ruffian, and with a sudden motion he drew a wicked-looking knife from under his ragged coat and flourished it menacingly in the air.

The fellow was plucky and meant fight, but in the young actor he had a foeman worthy of his steel.

Hardly had the knife-blade glittered in the air when out shot the muscular right arm of the young man with all the precision and seemingly with the force of a pile-driver, and the iron-like fist catching the ruffian squarely between the eyes, floored him as if he had been shot.

Down he went with a howl of rage.

He had been taken completely unawares, and was frightfully indignant at being thus roughly handled.

The force of the shock of his contact with the hard pavement sent both knife and bag flying out of his hands.

The bag fell close at hand, and Estelle, with a cry of delight, secured it, for dearly she prized the few trinkets it contained, but the knife, being heavier, went spinning into the middle of the street, far out of the reach of either of the combatants.

The actor cared nothing for this for he would have disdained to use the weapon, even if it had been within his reach, but with the ruffian the case was different.

He relied upon the knife to awe his antagonist, and he would not have hesitated for a moment to use it, if he thought there was a fair chance for him to make his escape.

The knife was out of his reach now though, and if he chose to pursue the quarrel, he must depend upon nature's weapons.

When he gained his feet, he surveyed the young actor with a critical eye.

He had been knocked down so expertly that he was rather curious to see what kind of a man it was who had performed the feat so dexterously.

In person Keene, like all well-built men of medium height, was extremely deceptive.

With his street-clothes on, he did not look to be nearly as big a man as in reality he was.

The actor weighted within a few ounces of a hundred and sixty pounds, and was in as nearly good condition as a pugilist trained for a desperate encounter, for he had no surplus fat upon him, and was in the best possible condition for a boxing-match.

The tramp was a bigger man every way than his antagonist, but he was gaunt and clumsy, his powers weakened by long dissipation, and he in reality stood no more chance to hold his own with such a man as now faced him, than if

he had picked up the champion slugger for an opponent.

The tramp, though, was not wise enough to understand this, and having vile liquor enough on board to make him angry, he rushed at Keene, bent on exterminating him at a single blow.

The reception he met with, however, completely took all the fight out of him.

The young actor met him with a "right hander" which seemed to fairly lift him from his feet; it struck him on the point of the jaw, and sent him over on his back, stunned and helpless.

He landed on his shoulders and then his head struck the pavement with a dull thud.

To use the language dear to the hearts of the sporting writers: "The tramp had been knocked out in one round."

"Take my arm now, Miss Estelle," said the victor, as quietly as though "knocking out" tramps was an every-day affair with him; "he has got enough to last him for some time."

And then the two proceeded up the street, leaving the ruffian to recover as best he might.

CHAPTER IX.

ESTELLE'S STORY.

THE girl had watched the encounter with almost breathless eagerness, but all had transpired so quickly that the ruffian, who had so wantonly assailed her, was vanquished almost before she realized that the fight had begun.

"I hope you haven't killed the man," she remarked, casting a parting glance at the prostate form of the ruffian as she proceeded up the street, arm in arm with her protector.

"Oh, no, no danger of that," Keene returned. "Fellows of his kidney have heads of iron, and they don't mind a few hard knocks."

"It's the only way to get any sense into their noddles. I didn't expect to lay the chap out so easily, but as he knew nothing of boxing and came at me like a mad bull, it was not difficult to put a blow where it would do good execution."

"He'll feel as if his head was too big for his body when he recovers his senses, but that is about all he will have to remind him of his downfall."

"How fortunate it was that you were near at hand to rescue me from this ruffian," the girl remarked, gratefully, and she looked with eyes full of trust in the young actor's face as she spoke.

"Yes, I am glad that I was able to be of service to you, for the fellow undoubtedly would have got off with your valuables if I had not happened to come upon the scene just as I did."

"In my boyish days, when I was at college, I took a great interest in boxing."

"In fact, some of my tutors used to remark that if I would pay as much attention to my studies as I did to my boxing, my standing in the class-room would be materially improved."

"As a boxer I easily ranked a good first, but I am sorry to say I cannot make the same vaunt in regard to scholarship."

"The boxing ability came in play to-night, though, and I must say I am glad now that I did waste some hours in making myself master of the science of self-defense."

"I have very little to lose, for the bag only contains a few pieces of old-fashioned jewelry, but I should hate to be obliged to part with them, for it is all in the world that I have to remind me of my mother." Tears sparkled in the great, lustrous eyes of Estelle as she spoke.

"I remember you said your mother was not living," the young actor remarked, touched by the pathos in the voice of the girl.

"No, neither father nor mother; I am an orphan, without a relative in the world, as far as I know."

"My own situation, exactly, so I can sympathize with you."

"You are an orphan, also?" questioned the girl, somewhat astonished at the coincidence.

"Yes, and have been so from an early age, but fortune favored me by providing me with a friend, who has been like a father to me."

"In fact, so much so that I have never known what it was to miss my own father."

"Of course, all the friends in the world could not make up for a mother's love."

"Oh, yes, I can understand that," the girl remarked, sympathetically.

"I was more fortunate than you, for I was blessed with a mother's love until a year ago."

"My father I never knew, and when in my thoughtless childhood I used to question my mother about him, her great, beautiful eyes would fill with tears and she would beg me not to worry her with questioning."

"Some day," she said, "when you are old enough to comprehend, I will tell you everything."

"So, as I grew older, perceiving that any recurrence to this subject gave my mother pain, I refrained from speaking about it."

"It was strange," Keene mused, having listened to the recital with a great deal of interest.

"Yes, it was plain to me that there were some memories connected with my father's death that gave mother pain whenever her mind dwelt upon

them, and so as I grew older and became more sensible, I tried my best to avoid bringing the sorrow of the past to her mind."

"A very sensible idea, indeed."

"And then mother acted so strangely at times that I did not know what to make of it."

"She seemed to be haunted by a constant fear, though exactly what she dreaded I never could make out."

"But the visit of any stranger to our humble home always worried her, no matter if it was only a peddler who came to the door with things to sell, and she never was at ease until he departed."

"That was strange," Keene observed.

"Yes, she seemed always haunted by a fear that some one, whom she evidently dreaded, would discover her whereabouts."

"Even the name we bore was a false one; in a moment of confidence she revealed that to me before she died."

"Mystery on mystery."

"Yes, the name by which she was known was Mrs. James, and one day when in childish curiosity I tormented her to know her first name, she replied it was Ellen, and then, seemingly thinking she had committed an imprudence in disclosing the fact to me, she scolded me for my persistence, and said I must never say anything to anybody about it."

"It certainly was very strange," the young man observed, perplexed by the odd affair.

"Yes, and when I became old enough to understand something of the world, I comprehended then that mother was acting as though she was hiding from some one and feared discovery."

"Her actions would certainly give rise to that surmise."

"But only guilty people hide, and I am sure my mother was a good, pure woman if ever there was one in the world!" the young actress exclaimed with warmth.

"Innocent people hide sometimes when pursued by the guilty," Keene observed. "You must remember there is such a thing as persecution in this world, and from appearances it seems to me as if your mother feared the malice of some deadly and unscrupulous foe."

"Yes, that is true."

"A hundred things come back to my memory now which serve to strengthen the belief that your supposition is correct."

"She was careful to keep me from the street as much as possible, and always expressly warned me not to talk with strangers, and if questioned regarding my name, my mother or my home, to shake my head and run away as fast as possible."

"How did your mother manage to live? had she any means of support?" the young actor asked, thinking it was possible that some clew to the mystery might be gained in this direction.

"She was an exceedingly skillful needle-woman, and was also expert in all sorts of fancy work, lace-making in particular; she made the most beautiful collars and handkerchiefs, articles that sold readily to the store for ten to twenty-five dollars apiece, and so she had no difficulty in making a comfortable living."

"We resided in the upper part of New York, occupying two rooms in a small wooden house on Eightieth street, and I have never known any other home."

"Madame Mikella boarded with the lady who owned the house and who occupied all the rest of it, and so I chanced to make her acquaintance."

"Just about a year ago my mother was taken suddenly ill; heart disease, the doctor said, and she sunk so rapidly that within six hours from the time of the first attack she expired."

The girl's voice faltered as she recalled the sad event, and it was a moment before she could go on.

"She barely had time to say a few parting words to me before the dark angel set his seal upon her lips."

"She said: 'Estelle, my child, I ought to have told you everything years ago, but I shrank from the painful task, and now it is too late; the secret will not perish with me, though, for I have written out all the particulars and inclosed them in an envelope which you will find in my trunk, securely sealed and directed to you.'

"On the envelope I have requested you not to open the packet until you are twenty-one."

"You will be a woman then and will be strong enough to take care of yourself."

"And you are not yet twenty-one?"

"No, I lack six months of it."

"Well, when the time comes, command me if you need any aid," Keene remarked, gallantly. "I am something of an amateur detective and really think seriously of going into that line altogether, and if yours is a difficult case I shall be glad to undertake it."

"You are so kind!" the girl exclaimed, in grateful accents.

"Not at all; I am an orphan like yourself, and know even less about my parents than you do."

"An old lawyer down in Texas, General Joe Yellowbird, has always taken charge of me,

and while professing utter ignorance in regard to my parents, has acted like a father to me."

"I shrewdly suspect the old fellow does know something of my parents, but for some reason he is reluctant to tell, some day, though, he may be induced to open his mouth."

By this time the two had arrived at the door of the boarding-house.

As luck would have it, Keene boarded in the rival professional house next door.

"As we are neighbors, you must allow me the privilege of seeing you home after the performance hereafter," Keene said, and the girl shyly accepted the offer.

And then they parted, as pleased with each other as two people could well be.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRISONER.

IN the Tombs prison sat the young man who had created such great confusion on the previous evening in the Bowery Theater.

His pedigree had been taken on his entrance to the prison, and on the books of that institution read as follows:

"Name, Richard Roe."

"Age, Twenty-four."

"Country, American."

"Occupation, Gentleman."

He was perfectly self-possessed, and, as all the prison officials who came in contact with him remarked, acted like an old stager.

"Pretty serious charge, young man," the warden remarked, in the reception-room, as he finished noting down the prisoner's answers to his questions.

"Will you excuse me, sir, if I object to that term, 'young man,' which you have just used?" the prisoner asked, with the utmost self-possession. "Between gentlemen, sir, such an expression is not at all permissible. You, I take it, are the person in charge of this institution; I am a gentleman who, by accident, has been brought here, but notwithstanding this I cannot allow you to address me in any such familiar manner."

This speech took the prison officials by surprise, and the grave and usually stolid warden leaned back in his chair and gazed with amazement upon the prisoner.

"Upon me woud, yeys have a howly cheek!" the old grizzled assistant warden cried, amazed out of all propriety by the impudence of the stranger.

As for the warden himself he hardly knew what to make of the stranger, who was well-dressed, although his clothes betrayed evident signs of long wear, and he had the air of a man who had been well brought up; evidently an educated person and one who had been used to mingling in good society, and yet, to the experienced eyes of the veteran, something about the man suggested that he was a member of that peculiar class who manage to pick up a living through their wits.

To use the French expression, a "chevalier of fortune," who preyed upon the world.

It was just possible, though, that there might be some mistake about the matter. The man's looks might belie him, and he might be a respectable member of society, after all.

The difference between the confidence-men who roam through the world seeking whom they may devour, and the young bloods of fashion, who sow their wild oats with a reckless hand, is not so great as to be detected at the first glance, even by the most experienced observer.

The warden was impressed by the manner of the prisoner. If he was only a common adventurer he was first-class in his line, at all events, as his superb bravado proved.

"I meant no offense, sir," the official responded. "All I intended to say was that you have got yourself in a bad box."

"Oh, not at all," the other responded, perfectly collected. "A man of your judgment, you know, ought not to believe all you hear. Experience ought to have shown you long ago that one tale is good until another is told. Both sides of the shield must be examined before one is justified in swearing positively as to its color."

"The accusation against you is a very serious one."

"You will be astonished at the ease with which I can disprove the allegation when I have an examination. Meanwhile, warden, I hope I am not asking anything out of the way when I request you to treat me with the respect due to a gentleman who, by an unfortunate mistake, is put into a false position."

"Certainly not, certainly not," replied the official, really bewildered by the assurance of the prisoner, whom he began to believe to be either one of nature's noblemen or else the coolest and most consummate scoundrel who had ever entered the gloomy portals of the gloomiest pile the United States can boast.

"All men are liable to fall into unpleasant scrapes once in a while, and I cannot hope to be more lucky than the average mortal. But, in the mean time, I hope you will do what you can to make my position as pleasant as possible."

"Of course," said the warden, more and more bewildered.

"I have plenty of money to pay for any extra accommodation you may be able to give me, consistent with your rules, and I trust you will treat me as well as possible."

"Oh, yes, we'll try to."

"I would like to see my counsel early in the morning, for I presume I will have an examination somewhere about ten or eleven in the morning."

"Yes, somewhere about that time."

"If you will permit me to send word to my counsel to-night I will be much obliged to you and I will requite the messenger handsomely for his trouble."

All the attendants pricked up their ears at this statement. This was exactly the kind of a prisoner all were anxious to see—a man both able and willing to pay for privileges.

Prisons do not differ materially from other places, and gold exerts a mighty influence.

"I'll see that the message is sent, so you will be able to arrange your defense before the court opens. Who is your counsel?" the warden asked.

"Have & Humpit," the prisoner answered.

This firm ranked high in New York in their especial branch—criminal business alone. They attended to no other practice, but were always ready to defend scoundrels of all grades, provided the accused could raise money enough to give them the handsome retainer which they almost invariably exacted.

Have & Humpit "came high," but the man who depended upon their aid to fight off the hangman's noose, thought he must have them if he could possibly raise money enough to secure their services.

In the case of a very great criminal, these learned gentlemen sometimes condescended to take the case without a fee, if the party could not possibly raise any money.

But this was done for the advertisement.

It is not considered professional to advertise, but lawyers who pursued their particular branch knew how necessary it was to keep their names prominently before the public, and how better could it be done than by figuring in the police columns of the daily papers as the counsel of the criminal whose crime was the newest sensation of the hour?

It is an old saying that brass is sometimes as good as gold in the world, and in this instance the assurance of the prisoner contributed to his being far better treated than he would otherwise have been.

In the morning, stimulated by a ten-dollar bill, one of the Tombs runners, as the men attached to the place who carry the messages are termed, hunted up the senior member of the legal firm, and contrived to so impress him with a sense of the importance of the prisoner, that Have concluded it must be some old-time client masquerading under a *nom de guerre*, for of course it was plain that "Richard Roe" was the same gentleman who figures so often in legal documents in company with John Doe.

But when the lawyer was ushered into the cell of the young man he saw immediately that his prospective client was a stranger.

The prisoner was reclining upon his bed with his arm under his head, staring at the ceiling in a meditative sort of way, but when the lawyer made his appearance, he immediately rose and greeted him with well-bred politeness.

Lawyer Have was a portly man, with an imposing presence and a decidedly theatrical way about him.

In the legal profession he bore the reputation of being a great "jury lawyer"—that is, he was a man who could be relied upon to make a good impression upon the average man who is called upon to pass judgment in a court-room.

His persuasive ways and theatrical manner usually had great weight with the gentlemen in the jury-box, and the lofty scorn with which he denounced the "peculiar" testimony of the witnesses for the prosecution, just as if he believed them all to be in a league to abuse his unfortunate client, so unjustly persecuted, always had its effect upon the "twelve good men and true," who sat in judgment.

Humpit did the fine work, hunted up flaws in the indictment, etc., and Have attended to the pleading.

The lawyer was a trifle disappointed when he discovered that the young man was not an old acquaintance, and the old counselor, being an unusual good judge of mankind, particularly of that portion who figure in police courts, was not favorably impressed with the prisoner.

"How 'y' do, Mr. Have?" said the gentleman, in a languid sort of way. "I've never had the pleasure of meeting you before, but, as you have a world-wide reputation, I believe I would have known you anywhere."

"I've got into a stupid sort of a scrape here; the charge against me is perfectly ridiculous, as you will perceive when you know all the particulars."

CHAPTER XI.

CONCOCTING A DEFENSE.

"I READ all about the affair in the newspapers this morning," the lawyer remarked, seating himself upon the stool, which, with the cot bed, composed the entire furniture of the cell.

"Yes, through the kindness of one of the runners I got a glimpse at the lying accounts myself," and the prisoner produced half a dozen newspapers from under the pillow of his bed. "About a dozen reporters have been here to interview my, already."

"You must be careful what you say to these newspaper men," the lawyer remarked.

"Oh, you mustn't think I am such a donkey as to have anything to say to them," the prisoner replied. "When they expressed their ardent desire to learn what I had to say about the matter, I told them, as a professional man, I couldn't afford to waste my time without being suitably remunerated, and therefore I should be obliged to charge them twenty-five dollars apiece, payable in advance."

"Of course they all shelled out the money," the lawyer observed, amused at the idea.

"Certainly, of course, every man Jack of them. These newspaper fellows are always rolling in wealth, you know," contemptuously. "If I had said twenty-five cents, now, the chances are they would have seen the 'deal' and 'come in.' Excuse me for using terms which may not be familiar to your ears. It is possible that you are not a poker-player."

"Well, I am slightly acquainted with the game," the lawyer admitted.

"Not a man of them had 'sand' enough to ante up; but now to business—I have sent for you to conduct my case. I have a perfect defense, as you will perceive. As I remarked in the beginning, the accusation is ridiculous."

The criminal lawyer was a good judge of mankind, particularly of that portion that finds its way into dungeon cells; and the impression he had formed of the prisoner was not a favorable one. He seemed to the practitioner just the kind of man to impress innocent and unsuspecting people, but the old lawyer set him down for a fraud of the first water.

Even he, excellent judge as he was, had been imposed upon by just such fellows, and he had made up his mind never again to be 'bilked' by such plausible scoundrels.

So before agreeing to defend the prisoner, he intended to be sure there was money in the case for him.

"You wish me to take charge of your case?"

"Yes; in your hands I shall feel safe."

"I presume you know that, as a lawyer, I demand large fees for my services?"

"Oh, yes, I know that. Although this is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting you yet you are not unknown to me by reputation, and that is the reason why I sent for you. Whenever I have anything to do with professional men, I make it a rule to get the best that money can procure."

"My rule is never to undertake a case without receiving a retaining fee," suggested the practitioner.

"Of course; the laborer is worthy of his hire. Give me a bit of paper and pencil and I will write you an order on the warden. My valuables are in his possession. By inquiring of him you will find that I have a thousand odd dollars in his hands."

This statement surprised the lawyer, for he had not expected to find the prisoner so well "heeled."

Have produced a memorandum book and a stylograph pen.

The prisoner tore out a leaf, wrote a few words upon it and handed the paper to the lawyer.

"I have made the order for a hundred dollars; is that enough?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," responded the other, readily, astonished at the liberality of the fee, for he had expected but half that amount.

"And now that is settled, let me outline my defense.

"In the first place, I am a stranger in the city, being an Englishman by birth, and at present engaged on a tour which will probably take me around the world. I am a gentleman, possessed of ample means, as I can easily prove by a hundred witnesses in the old country if it be necessary.

"My name is Roe, Richard Roe. Whether it is my true name or not is no one's business, for I assume I have as much right to a *nom de guerre* when on my travels as any other man.

"You know it is a common thing for an English lord, when abroad, to drop his title, particularly when traveling in a republican country."

"Oh, then you are a member of the English aristocracy."

"No, no, I didn't say that!" the prisoner exclaimed, quickly. "I didn't say that I am anything except plain Richard Roe."

"I see, I see."

"Now in regard to this case; I don't know anything about this actress whom I am accused of shooting. I never saw her before last night in my life, and there isn't the least doubt that she will bear me out in that assertion, so there was no motive for my attempting to injure her. Men don't do such things without motives, you know."

The lawyer nodded assent to this proposition.

"That's very true," he admitted, "but the

shot which wounded the young lady came from the box of which you were the only occupant; there is no doubt about that; and from the statement of some of the witnesses as given in the newspapers, quite a number of them are prepared to swear that they saw you fire the shot."

"Oh, yes, of course; under the circumstances it is only natural," the other observed, apparently not at all disturbed by this damaging evidence. "There isn't a question but that the shot did come from my box, and it is only natural that all who saw me in there should jump to the conclusion that I fired it; and that quite a number of them should really believe they saw me discharge the weapon is not strange, although it is ridiculous to suppose that the eyes of a half-dozen or more of the stage-performers should happen to be fastened upon my box just at that particular moment."

This was a strong point, and the lawyer nodded his head in approval.

"Now for the explanation: the shot was fired from my box, and fired by a stranger who crept in, unobserved by me, and the pistol was held so close to my head that I was stunned by the discharge, and before I could recover sufficiently from the shock to attempt to secure him, he made his escape."

The lawyer elevated his eyebrows and shook his head.

"Oh, no, no!" he exclaimed, "that will not do at all—not at all," he repeated, decidedly. "The idea is clever enough, but in this case it will not work."

"Luckily, I have had a good deal to do with theaters in my time, and so am well posted in regard to the ground. The Old Bowery Theater I am particularly well acquainted with. Access to your box could be gained in two ways only—from the front of the house through the lobby, the door to which is always kept locked, and four parties only have keys—the manager of the theater, the stage manager, the ushers, and the gas man, who acts also as janitor.

"I backed the manager of the theater a couple of years ago to the tune of about five thousand dollars," the lawyer remarked with a grimace, "and so happen to know all about the internal workings of the machine."

"The other entrance to the passageway back of the box is from the stage, guarded also by a locked door, to which the same parties, the ushers excepted, hold the keys."

"It would have been difficult for the stranger you speak of to gain admittance to the box, and impossible for him to escape from it after firing the shot without being seen by some one."

"He escaped by the door leading to the stage, and I was pursuing him when arrested by the stage men," the prisoner explained.

"Now, now, that will not hold water," the lawyer exclaimed. "Don't you see how weak and flimsy the tale is?"

"This unknown of whom you speak would have only been a minute in advance of you, and the same men who detained you would most assuredly have laid hold of him."

"I probably made a mistake, and he went out by the other door into the front of the house," the prisoner observed, with perfect composure.

"Yes, pushed his way through a lobby crowded with people without anybody noticing him. Too thin, my boy, too thin."

"What is the defense, then? Of course I will be guided by you, as I am too old a hand to attempt to teach a professional man his business."

"A general denial. You didn't fire the shot—had no motive to attempt to hurt the young lady, a perfect stranger to you—and don't know anything at all about the matter."

"Let the prosecution make out a case if they can."

And this was to be the defense.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIAL.

The prisoner's examination took place about eleven o'clock.

Judge Andy was on the bench and the courtroom was crowded, for the peculiar circumstances of the case had attracted general attention.

Nothing of particular interest transpired, for the moment the case was called, Counselor Have rose, announced that he appeared for the prisoner, spoke of the little time that had been afforded him to look into the case, stating that he had only been retained that morning, and pleaded for a postponement.

This Judge Andy was reluctant to grant.

His idea was to make an impression upon the girl by showing her how eager he was to punish her assailant.

But the lawyer was a power in every criminal court in the city, and the judge was anxious to be on good terms with him; then, too, custom was on the side of the counselor in asking for a postponement.

So, reluctantly, the prisoner was remanded for a week, and the audience, who had come prepared for some very racy developments, were obliged to go away disappointed.

The incident proved to be an immense advertisement for the theater, though, and the vast

building was crowded nightly, all anxious to see the heroine of the shooting-match.

During the week the lawyer adroitly managed to weave quite a romance about the prisoner.

The press, ever eager to turn an honest penny out of the sensations of the hour, lent ready aid.

And so public opinion was educated to regard the prisoner in a different light from that in which he had at first appeared.

Instead of the reckless, bloodthirsty assassin, he now seemed to be at the most a wild young Englishman with plenty of money, probably of good family and possibly of noble blood, who had come to America for the purpose of sowing a few wild oats.

Then, too, the wily lawyer caused an impression to get abroad that the whole thing was but an advertising dodge, got up in the interest of the actress and the theater, in order to attract people to the dramatic temple.

When this view of the affair was called in question and in proof that an assault with a deadly purpose had been committed, the slight wound received by the actress was mentioned, the scratch, for it was barely more, was ridiculed as a stage trick got up for the express purpose of making the matter look serious.

On the second appearance of the young man before the bar of justice the court-room was crowded to excess.

This time lawyer Have announced that he was ready to go on, and the examination began.

The accused was brought to the bar and the charge of assault with intent to kill formally made against him.

He was perfectly cool, and looked around him with as much indifference as though he was but a spectator instead of one of the principal actors in the scene.

"Not guilty," he replied, to the formal question put to him.

Then the examination began.

Witness after witness was brought to the stand, but about all of them testified the same.

About all swore they had noticed the accused in the box, saw the flash of the revolver when the shot was fired, and some swore positively that they saw the prisoner fire the shot.

This was not the truth, by the way, for not a single soul had witnessed the firing of the shot, for the young man had retired to the back of the box in the semi-darkness, had knelt down and taken deliberate aim over the back of a chair, and from this position it was an utter impossibility for any one either on the stage or in the auditorium of the theater to see him discharge the pistol.

He had posted his counsel in regard to this, and the astute lawyer had taken the trouble to go to the theater with some friends, got in the private box himself and assumed the position occupied by the young man, while the others walked up and down on the stage just as the actors did on the night of the event, so he was fully prepared to prove by witnesses who were totally unprejudiced in regard to the matter, that it was an utter impossibility for any one upon the stage to see the prisoner fire the shot if he was at the back of the box, and the lawyer, before he sprung the trap upon the witnesses for the prosecution, was careful to get each one to state the exact position occupied by the accused.

And one and all were particular in stating that the young man was lurking in the obscurity at the back of the box when the shot was discharged.

These witnesses, too, were not really conscious that they were telling an untruth when they asserted that they had seen the accused fire the revolver, as the lawyer was careful to remark.

Drawing from the fund of his experience, he said he could recall a dozen instances where witnesses had believed they had seen a certain occurrence and swore directly to the fact, misled by a fertile imagination, when it was an utter impossibility for them to have done anything of the kind.

So by the time the counsel had got through with these witnesses, about everybody in the court-room had come to the conclusion that it would have been better for the prosecution to have kept them off the stand altogether.

And when it came to the manager's turn to undergo the cross-examination, the learned counsel put such extraordinary questions that the prosecuting attorney was obliged to protest again and again and appeal to the judge for the protection of the witness.

Have's questions were all based upon the assumption that the manager of the theater, the actress and the young man had entered into a conspiracy to humbug the public, but that after the prisoner had performed his part of the agreement the others had thrown him overboard and endeavored to make a scape-goat out of him.

The judge was obliged to rebuke the zeal of the counsel, and the lawyer, after quite an argument, finally gave up, but he did so with an air that plainly said:

"You see I am on the true scent and they do not dare to let me proceed."

The actress herself was the last witness examined, and there was a deal of interest excited when she took the stand.

In a modest but perfectly intelligent way she told the story of the assault.

But she unlike some of the other witnesses, would not swear to seeing the young man discharge the pistol.

She had noticed him in the box, she said, and happening to glance that way just before the shot was fired, had noticed that he had retired to the back of the apartment, but she was positive that she had seen the flash of the pistol and that the shot had been discharged from the rear of the private box.

Then the cross-examination began.

All expected that there would be a stormy scene, for the lawyer had been after the witnesses with a sharp stick, to use the common expression.

But to the surprise of everybody in the court-room, the counselor beamed upon the young actress in the most fatherly manner.

But those who were well acquainted with the lawyer understood that he was far more dangerous when he assumed this friendly expression, than when he glared at the witnesses as though he regarded them as mortal enemies, and would be only too glad to slaughter them in cold blood.

After a few preliminary questions of small import the advocate came promptly down to business by saying:

"How long have you known this gentleman?" and he pointed to the prisoner.

The actress appeared surprised.

"Sir?" she said, as if she did not understand the question.

"Do not hesitate to answer!" the lawyer exclaimed, warningly, and in his most solemn and impressive tones.

"Remember that you are under oath to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

"How long have you known this gentleman?"

Then to the surprise of all who imagined from the lawyer's manner that some important testimony was about to be given, the lady replied that she not only did not know the prisoner, but to the best of her knowledge and belief she had never seen him before in her life until she set eyes upon him in the auditorium of the theater.

"Then, as the prisoner is an utter stranger to you, you do not know any reason why he should attempt to harm you?"

"No, sir."

"That is all."

The witness descended from the stand; the lawyer had made his point.

There being absolutely no reason why the assault should be committed, seemed to throw considerable doubt upon the prisoner's guilt.

People in possession of their senses do not as a rule attempt to commit murder without a reason.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRISONER'S STATEMENT.

CARRYING out his usual plan, the counsel for the defense had succeeded in considerably befogging the matter.

"Your Honor," he said, after the actress had descended from the witness-box and the prosecution had announced that they had no more testimony to offer, "this is one of those peculiar cases which defy explanation."

"To suppose that this young man—a stranger in this land, with not a friend in the country, sojourning among us for the purpose of making himself familiar with our people and our institutions, should attempt to murder in cold blood a young woman who is a total stranger to him, without the slightest reason for the commission of such a crime, is utterly absurd."

"Men do not attempt to murder without a motive, and so far not the slightest bit of testimony has been presented tending to show that there was any motive for this crime on the part of the accused."

"The case to me seems to be perfectly plain. The accusation is all a mistake."

"I will show your Honor conclusively that the witness who testified in regard to the firing of the shot, and who seemed so positive that the prisoner discharged the weapon, are mistaken in regard to the matter—their imagination has run away with them, and while I have not the least doubt that they believe they saw the occurrence, yet I will prove to you that it is utterly impossible for them to have witnessed the discharging of the pistol if it was fired from the rear of the private-box, as they all distinctly swore."

Then the lawyer put his friends on the stand who had accompanied him to the theater, and their evidence was convincing that the previous witnesses had been grossly in error in their statements.

"One other witness, and I am through," the counselor remarked, when the gentlemen had delivered their testimony.

"I will put the prisoner himself upon the stand and let him tell his story."

All within the apartment pricked up their

ears, metaphorically speaking, when the young man went upon the witness-stand.

He told a plain, straightforward story.

English by birth and possessed of a sufficiently large amount of this world's goods to keep him from want, he had crossed the ocean, like young Lord Bateman, strange countries for to aid.

On the night of the attempted murder, happening to be on the east side of town, he had strolled into the Old Bowery.

He admitted that he was considerably under the influence of liquor when he entered the theater, having been drinking to excess for a couple of days, and hardly knew what he was doing, although, as he explained, having a very strong head, and being used to strong liquor from childhood, he seldom betrayed that he was under the influence of liquor until he came to that point when his legs refused to longer support him.

After getting in the box he had slept at intervals, until some unusual noise awakened him.

At the time he did not know what it was, but now he supposed it was the pistol-shot.

Having a vague apprehension that something was wrong, he endeavored to leave the theater, but not being acquainted with the premises, he made a mistake and got onto the stage instead of going into the front of the house.

"Are you acquainted with this young actress?" the counselor asked.

"No, sir."

"Did you ever see her before the time when you witnessed her performance upon the stage?"

"No, sir."

"Are you in the habit of carrying fire-arms?"

"No, sir."

"Do not carry a pistol or revolver?"

"No, sir, never carried such a thing in my life. We are not in the habit of going armed in England."

One particularly weak point in the case was that the revolver with which the shot had been fired had not been produced.

The testimony showed that when the young man had been arrested no weapon bigger than a penknife had been found upon his person, nor had the most careful search at the theater, disclosed the weapon from which the shot had been fired.

The supposition was that the accused had dropped the weapon in his flight and that some dishonest person had picked it up and kept the matter secret so as to be able to retain the weapon.

On the whole the examination was decidedly favorable to the accused, and though Judge Andy refused to discharge him, as the counselor, in a florid speech, demanded, but held him for trial, yet he fixed the bail at the moderate amount of one thousand dollars.

The prisoner returned to the Tombs, and the audience dispersed decidedly dissatisfied at the entertainment which had been furnished them.

At the close of the examination the young actress, at the request of the manager, visited the judge in his private room.

"I brought Miss Estelle to see you in order to get your opinion in regard to the case," Freehigh explained, when he introduced the young lady.

The judge shook hands with her warmly, inquired after her health, brought her a chair, and altogether could not have been more polite if she had been the greatest lady in the land.

"It's a very doubtful case," Judge Andy observed, in answer to the manager's question.

"I'm afraid that we will not be able to commit the fellow."

"The trouble with your actor chaps was that they swore too much."

"If they hadn't declared so positively that they saw the fellow fire the shot, it would have been much better for the prosecution."

"You see the lawyer completely upset that part of their testimony. That is the great trouble with a majority of witnesses; they are so anxious to make a good story, that they stretch things, and when they get into the hands of a smart lawyer, he soon tears their testimony all to pieces."

"What do you think of it, Miss Estelle?"

"In my mind there isn't the least doubt that he is the person who fired the shot, though why he should wish to injure me, a perfect stranger to him, I cannot imagine."

"You were not able to swear to seeing him fire the shot though?" the judge remarked.

"No, although I saw him in the box but a few minutes before, and distinctly saw the flash of the powder in the back of the apartment when the weapon was discharged."

"I just had a little talk with the assistant district attorney, who conducted the prosecution, and he thinks that, unless more evidence is discovered, it will be useless to go on with the case, for with what he has at present there isn't a chance for a conviction."

"Unless he can secure some stronger evidence the case will be pigeon-holed."

"That is," the judge explained, "the fellow will be released on bail and the case never called for trial."

"That will be perfectly outrageous!" the

manager exclaimed, assuming to be excessively indignant. "For the sake of Miss Estelle here, judge, you ought to stretch a point and keep the fellow under lock and key for awhile, anyhow."

"Oh, no, no!" the actress hastened to exclaim. "I do not bear any malice. I did not suffer any particular injury, and though I feel sorry to think that any one should wish to do me harm, yet I am Christian enough to forgive the injury."

"Then, too, I do not think that the young man is quite right in his mind; there is a strange glitter in his eyes at times."

"I watched him narrowly all through the examination, and every once in a while an expression came into his eyes which reminded me more of an animal than a human."

"The assistant district attorney has got some such idea in his head," the judge remarked. "His theory is that the man did the shooting in a sort of crazy freak, brought on by excessive drink, and I myself rather incline to the belief that that is the true explanation."

"It seems reasonable," the manager observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, men in their senses don't generally run the risk of the State Prison or the gallows without some weighty reason, and in this case the fellow certainly had no good cause for wishing to take your life. It looks to me like the reckless freak of a drunken man, and I guess that is all there is to it."

The manager said that in his opinion there wasn't the least doubt the theory was the true one, and the actress remarked, simply, that it was possibly true.

She could not tell these strangers that she feared this man was the mysterious foe of whom her dead mother had so constantly stood in dread.

He answered the description to the letter, and his attempt upon her life seemed to be confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ.

The judge did his best to produce a favorable impression upon the young girl, and at the close of the interview, assured her that he would do his best to have her assailant punished, if proofs of his guilt could be obtained.

Then the manager and the actress withdrew.

"I tell you, you're solid with the judge!" Freehigh exclaimed, in a tone of conviction.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT ON BAIL.

AFTER the prisoner had been conveyed to his cell, the lawyer seized an early opportunity to call upon him.

The criminal advocate felt rather jubilant over the successful manner in which he had conducted the case, and intimated as much to his client.

The young man seemed to take the matter very coolly, merely remarking:

"I knew they couldn't make out a case against me."

"You managed the thing pretty well," the lawyer observed, rubbing his hands together and gazing with an admiring eye upon his client, for whose abilities he was beginning to have considerable respect.

"But I say, what on earth did you do with your pistol?" the counselor continued. "It was really a stroke of genius—the getting the weapon out of the way, so that it could not be produced against you. It was a very pretty bit of business—very well worked indeed."

"You talk as if you thought I fired the shot at the girl!" exclaimed the prisoner, a peculiar expression upon his dark face.

"Of course you did!" the other asserted. "What is the use of your trying to pull the wool over my eyes, though I don't exactly 'get on' to the motives that actuated you in trying to kill the girl. I suppose you were on a bit of a spree and didn't know exactly what you were doing."

"Bah! I never got so much liquor on board yet as not to know exactly what I was about!" the other replied, contemptuously. "But if I did do the deed, do you think I would be idiot enough to admit it to any one? If I was foolish enough to do that, I should deserve to be hung."

The lawyer settled back in his chair and surveyed the prisoner with an expression of considerable curiosity, and the thought ran through his mind that he was a bigger rascal than he had taken him to be.

"What's the next move on the programme?" the prisoner asked; "to procure bail, I suppose."

"Yes, that is it."

"And then?"

"That will be the end of the case, unless some new and strong evidence is discovered."

"The matter is ended, then, for nothing of that kind can be discovered," the prisoner remarked, decidedly.

"If that is so, the case will never be called for trial, for the prosecution know very well that the odds are a thousand to one they could not secure a conviction as matters stand now."

"How about the bail?" the young man inquired. "Can you procure me a bondsman?"

"Oh, I don't know about that; I suppose I could put you on the track so the matter might be arranged."

"Straw bail, I suppose, and you, while willing to take the money to be made by the operation, are careful not to get mixed up in the matter," the prisoner remarked, with a slight sneer.

"Straw bail?" the lawyer questioned.

"Yes, a worthless bondsman, some rascal who will swear he is worth ten or twelve thousand dollars when he isn't worth as many cents."

"It is all a matter of form, of course. As the case is never likely to be called for trial, what does it matter whether the bail is good for anything or not?"

"The judge will wink at any man that you present, of course, so long as he looks anything like the real article."

"Upon my word, young man, you disclose a familiarity with the undercurrent of life in a police court that is really astonishing, unless you are some distinguished member of the swell mob from across the herring pond," the criminal lawyer remarked.

"I'm a gentleman, but I've seen a little of life in my time, I believe," the other retorted, and an evil expression came into his eyes as he fixed them upon the lawyer.

"Some pretty bad life, I should think," the other remarked.

"Well, my friend, I don't do anything in the straw bail line, and it wouldn't do you any good if I did, for I have heard that Judge Andy—he is the man who presided at your examination and before whom your bail question will come—is a little sweet on this pretty actress, and he'll be apt to give you all the trouble he can, so your bail will have to be first-class or he will not accept it."

"The judge is after her, eh?" and a peculiar expression shot rapidly over the dark face of the young man.

"So I have heard," the lawyer replied, studying the face of the prisoner intently, anxious to get a clew to the mystery which seemed to involve the relationship of the actress and her would-be assassin, for despite the assertion under oath of both the parties that they had never seen each other before, somehow, in his heart of hearts, he felt that this was not the exact truth.

Long experience had caused the lawyer to have very little faith in the statements of his fellow-beings, even when given under oath, and though he believed the actress was speaking the truth when she said she knew absolutely nothing whatever about the young man, yet he did not place equal credence in his assurance that the lady was a perfect stranger to him.

The prisoner was quick to perceive that the lawyer had his eyes upon him, and so he assumed the mask of indifference.

"The judge is a man of taste," he remarked, carelessly. "She is a pretty girl and he could not be blamed for admiring a woman far less beautiful."

"But to return to our mutton, about this bail business. If a straw man won't work, and a substantial bond must be given, how can it be arranged?"

"I can get plenty of men to go on your bond, if they are paid for their trouble and made safe against loss."

"You mean I will have to put up money to the amount of the bond?"

"Yes."

"I can do that easily enough. Have you a pen-knife?"

The lawyer produced one and handed it to the prisoner.

Taking up the skirt of his coat he ripped open the lining at a particular place and took out a small parcel about as big as a good-sized bean carefully wrapped in tissue paper the lawyer watching him meanwhile with curious eyes.

Removing the paper he displayed to the astonished gaze of Counselor Have a diamond of the first water.

"How is that for a sparkler?" he queried.

"Beautiful! but is it the real thing?" the lawyer inquired, a little doubtfully.

"You wear diamonds enough to be a good judge," the other replied, with a glance at the sparkling array displayed upon the spotless shirt-front of the advocate, and as he spoke he placed the jewel in Have's hand.

The lawyer was no mean judge of this sort of thing and after a careful examination he said he thought there wasn't any doubt it was the genuine article.

"And worth how much?" the prisoner asked.

"A couple of thousand, maybe."

"Take it to any leading jeweler and you can get three for it, and then the man will stand a chance to make five hundred on his bargain!" the young man exclaimed.

The lawyer admitted that this might be true.

"Dispose of it, find a bondsman and get me out of here as soon as possible."

Promising to do the best he could the counselor withdrew.

And he was as good as his word.

He had no trouble in disposing of the dia-

mond through a broker friend for three thousand dollars, and easily procured a man of property who, for a consideration of a hundred dollars, agreed to go bail for the young man, sufficient money being put up to secure him from harm in case there was any trouble.

Just one week, then, from the day of his examination, Richard Roe walked out of the Tombs a free man, and from the way matters were it certainly looked as if he would never be called upon to stand trial for the offense which it was alleged he had committed.

The young actor, Keene, had watched the progress of the affair with curious eyes.

In his mind there wasn't the least doubt that the man was the one who had fired the shot, although as far as he could discover there wasn't the least reason in the world why he should desire the death of the girl.

Estelle herself was troubled by the miscarriage of justice.

"I greatly fear that I shall hear from him in the future," she admitted to Keene, "though I know of no reason why he or any one else should desire to trouble me."

Ten days after the discharge of the young man on bail the young actress's suspicion was verified.

It was in the afternoon, and word was sent to Estelle, busy in her room at the boarding-house, that a gentleman desired to see her in the parlor.

When she entered the apartment Richard Roe greeted her.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRANGER EXPLAINS.

ESTELLE was amazed, for, of all persons, he was the last one whom she expected to see, and, instinctively, she recoiled, as, with a smiling face, the young man arose to receive her.

Roe was quick to notice the impression which his appearance produced, and immediately set to work to dispel the alarm which it was only too evident the girl felt.

"Do not be under any apprehension I beg!" he exclaimed. "I assure you there is not the least cause for you to feel alarmed. I trust that, notwithstanding the unfortunate circumstances which attended our first meeting, you will look upon me in the light of a true friend."

During this speech Estelle had, in a measure, recovered her composure, and she examined the young man with a careful eye.

The impression took possession of her that, although she could not remember ever having met the person before, her visitor was no stranger to her.

It was very odd.

She could not recall his face at all, though she earnestly searched the tablets of her memory over and over, yet his features seemed familiar to her, and the tones of his voice were not at all strange to her ears.

Although she was not so sure about the face, yet the voice she was positive she had heard before, but the remembrance was so vague and indistinct that it seemed more like a dream than anything else.

And she was so busy in trying to account for this strange remembrance that the only reply she made to the young man's speech was a simple "Yes, sir."

"Permit me to offer you a chair," he said, hastening to bring one and tendering it to Estelle with courtly politeness.

Almost mechanically the girl accepted the proffered seat.

Then, with the air of a man who felt at peace with himself and all the rest of the world, he took possession of the stuffed rocking-chair, and lay back in it as if he owned the house and all its contents.

"Now, to begin at the beginning, to use the old saying," he said, "I presume that, owing to the unfortunate chain of circumstances in this mysterious affair, you feel almost morally certain I was the miscreant who fired the pistol-shot which came so near to doing you a fearful injury."

"I—yes, I hate to be obliged to say it, but I am not able to form any other opinion," Estelle replied, somewhat confused by the abrupt question.

"Let us argue the matter," he remarked, coolly, not at all disturbed by the frankness of the maiden's reply.

"What reason had I to wish to injure you?"

Estelle shook her head.

"You do not know?"

"No, sir."

"Neither do I, and I think I am perfectly safe in saying that, as far as we know, no reason exists. I am a perfect stranger to you. You never saw me before?"

"No, sir, not to my knowledge, and yet—" The girl hesitated, for on the impulse of the moment she had said more than she intended.

"Yet what?" the young man asked, immediately, his keen dark eyes fixed suspiciously upon the face of the girl.

Estelle was truthful by nature, and as there wasn't really any urgent reason why she should keep concealed the thoughts that were in her mind in regard to the young man, she determined to speak freely.

"Although I cannot remember ever meeting you before, yet there is something about your face that seems familiar to me, and your voice I am sure I have heard before."

"You are certain you have heard my voice before?" and as he put the question there came a look in his eyes that seemed ominous to the girl, although so perfect was the command he had over his features, no other trace of anxiety could be discerned.

"Yes."

"That is certainly very strange, for I do not think we have ever met before."

"I cannot recall the circumstance if we have."

"And yet my voice is familiar to you?" and an incredulous look came over his face. "Explain the riddle."

"I cannot, and it puzzles me."

"Yes, I should imagine it would. It is strange, too, you do not seem to me like a stranger. I assure you I took a decided interest in you the moment you made your appearance on the stage, and I trust you will believe me when I assure you, upon my solemn word of honor as a man and a gentleman, I am totally innocent of any attempt to do you harm."

"That is the reason why I have waited upon you to-day. I wished to satisfy you that I had nothing to do with the affair, and also desired to proffer my aid in ferreting out the author of the deed."

"I thought it possible that I might obtain from you some clew which would aid me in discovering the wretch."

Estelle shook her head.

"I do not think I can furnish you with any information that will be of value," she said.

"Try and recall the events of your past life," he remarked, in an insinuating way.

"Look back over the records of bygone days."

"At some time in the past have you not, by some heedless act, made an enemy of some one who would not hesitate to use any means to secure full measure of revenge?"

"No, sir; never to my knowledge by any act of mine have I ever made an enemy of a human being," Estelle replied.

The young man appeared to be plunged in deep reflection for a few moments and then he spoke.

"It is very, very strange," he observed. "There must be some reason for the deadly attack."

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, clapping his hand to his forehead and tapping it as he spoke.

"I have it! It is strange I did not think of it before."

"There may be some family reason."

"Some family reason?" questioned Estelle, who did not understand what the young man meant.

"Yes; that is it, evidently. You are innocent of ever having given offense, but are pursued for family reasons."

"Oh, I think you are wrong, sir. I do not understand how such a thing can be."

"Miss Estelle, I do not wish to pry into your private matters, but I am so anxious to get a clew by means of which I can be able to hunt down and punish this atrocious ruffian, that I trust you will pardon me if I ask you concerning your past life."

"You are known professionally, I believe, as Miss Estelle. I presume I am correct in assuming that that is only part of your name, and like a great many other ladies in public life you keep your surname concealed."

The actress simply nodded.

She did not like this questioning, and already she had made up her mind not to gratify the intrusive curiosity of her visitor.

"As I am convinced I have hit upon the true solution of this mystery, and that you have been attacked solely upon the account of others, may I beg you to acquaint me with your name and some particulars of your family history?"

Estelle shook her head.

"I trust you will pardon me for declining," she replied, politely, but in a tone which plainly showed she was fully in earnest in her determination.

"My past life and family history would not afford you any clew. There isn't anything in particular to conceal. My life up to the time of my adoption of the stage as a profession is barren of incident, nor is there in my family history, as far as I know, aught worth the telling."

"Therefore I do not refrain from speaking because there is anything I ought not to tell, but simply because there is nothing to relate."

The young man fixed his keen, dark eyes searchingly upon the face of the actress, as if he wished to assure himself that she was speaking the truth, but she bore the scrutiny unflinchingly.

"I am sorry to be thus baffled at the very beginning of my search," he remarked, rising.

"If there was some dark secret connected with your family—some motive to induce a secret enemy to attempt your death—"

"It is nonsense, sir," exclaimed the actress. "My family matters are as plain and humdrum as can well be, and I know of no earthly reason why any one should wish to injure me."

"I am sorry not to obtain a clew," he ob-

served, advancing toward the door. "But I trust I will be more lucky in some other direction. May I be allowed the pleasure of calling upon you once in a while?"

Polytely, but firmly, Estelle declined to give the permission, and the young man departed, evidently annoyed at the result of his interview.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ACTOR'S DETERMINATION.

ESTELLE accompanied her visitor to the door, and as he walked up the Bowery in one direction, the young actor, Edmund Keene, came toward the house in the other.

The sidewalk was well filled with people hurrying along, and so it happened that although Keene caught a glimpse of the young man as he left the house, he escaped recognition on the part of the other.

If Roe had happened to notice Keene, he most assuredly would have recognized him, for the young actor had been one of the principal witnesses against him.

Keene was on his way to his boarding-house, one door above the residence of Estelle, and as she lingered for a moment to gaze after the departing visitor, he was enabled to accost her before she closed the door.

"That is a party I did not expect to see in this neighborhood," the young actor remarked, nodding in the direction that Roe had taken.

"Neither did I, but come in and I will explain to you the circumstance," Estelle replied. "I am glad you happened along as I need counsel and I am sure you will be able to advise me."

"I certainly will try to," Keene observed.

"From appearances I fear I am threatened with trouble in the future."

"Coming from this man?" the actor asked, hastily.

"Yes."

"I am not surprised, for I have been satisfied from the beginning that he was a bad egg."

Keene then followed the girl into the house and they repaired to the parlor where they seated themselves for an earnest consultation.

Estelle related the particulars of her interview with the young man and Keene listened with the greatest attention.

After she had finished, he remained silent for a few moments busy in thought.

"It is extremely strange, the actress added.

"Yes, and the more I think about the matter the more I am convinced that this man was the one who fired the shot despite his protestations of innocence; he is your enemy and intends to work you harm."

"But why should he wish to injure me?" Estelle asked. "I never did aught to him—never saw him before to my knowledge."

"It is a mystery, and the more it is examined the deeper it becomes," Keene answered.

"It is evident to me, however, that he is actuated by some powerful motive. Men do not recklessly expose themselves to the chance of finding lodgings in State Prison without some excellent reason."

"But I have a slight clew I think. You were frank enough to confide in me and put me in possession of your story, if you remember."

The young girl nodded.

"So I am not working altogether in the dark as I would be if you had not chosen to make the revelation."

"If you remember, your mother was haunted by a fear that she would be troubled by an enemy whose personal description answers to one that would be given of this young man."

"Don't you recollect as we stood together on the stage on the night of your attempted murder I noticed this man in the box and called your attention to him, saying at the time, that he answered the description you had given to the letter?"

"Yes, I remember the circumstance."

"In my opinion this is the man your mother feared, and yet I am puzzled to understand how it can be, for this man is young, and at the time when your mother was in dread of being discovered by him, could only have been a youth of tender years."

"Possibly he is older than he appears," Estelle suggested.

"That is not impossible, of course, but at the very outside he cannot be a man of over thirty, and deducting fifteen years from that, which would bring it back to the time when your mother experienced her dread, leaves him a boy of fifteen, so it cannot be that he is the man she feared."

"Your reasoning certainly appears to be correct, and I confess I am utterly at a loss to account for the man's actions," Estelle remarked, in perplexity.

"It is a complex affair apparently, and yet like many another puzzle, it may be very simple when it is understood," Keene observed.

"This man's hostility to you, I firmly believe, arises from some family secret—some old-time feud which for some unexplainable reason your mother hesitated to confide to you; probably she intended to speak at some time, but kept putting it off, and then death suddenly sealed her lips forever."

"He is not old enough to be a party to the original quarrel, but after the Corsican style a legacy of the hatred may have descended to him."

"He may be the living image of a father, and that father was the man your mother feared."

"That idea never occurred to me!" the young actress exclaimed, immediately impressed with the force of the reasoning.

"It is the only plausible explanation that occurs to me," Keene remarked.

"There must be some reason for his actions, unless, as I said before, he is a lunatic, and from what I have seen of him, I think I can safely say, he is decidedly more knave than fool."

"Then his visit to you to-day and his anxiety to learn the history of your life. Why should he care who or what you are?"

"It looks to me as if he was curious to learn whether you knew or suspected that there was a mystery connected with your life."

"It certainly does look as if that was the object of his visit," Estelle observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, evidently that was one reason, and the other was to get upon friendly terms with you if possible."

"If he could succeed in gaining your confidence, it would be more easy for him to strike a deadly blow."

The young actress grew pale and a slight shudder convulsed her form.

"Oh, how dreadful!" she murmured. "What have I ever done to be thus persecuted?"

"The answer to that question is an easy one," Keene replied. "You are innocent of all wrong-doing, but are so situated that it is for some one's interest that you should be made to suffer."

"Why it is so, is of course a mystery, but with your permission I will undertake to unravel the tangled skein."

"Oh, will you?" and the bright blue eyes of the girl danced with gladness.

"Yes, I have a decided liking for detective work, and have always flattered myself that if I had half a chance I might astonish the world by showing myself to be a second Vidocq."

The actor uttered these remarks in a laughing sort of way, but that he was fully in earnest was amply proved by the determined look in his dark eyes.

"It will be so kind of you, and I shall be truly grateful for the service," she observed, and from the way in which she spoke Keene felt satisfied that the speech came straight from the heart.

"I fear though," she continued, "I never shall be able to pay you for all your kindness to me."

"Now don't say a word about the bill until I send it in," he replied.

"In the first place I am glad of an opportunity to serve you," he added. "In the second I have taken a hearty dislike for this scoundrel, and would be glad of a chance to trip up his heels, and in the third I am rather hungry for an opportunity to distinguish myself in the detective line."

"I flatter myself that if I have any sort of a show at all I can send the name of the Actor Detective rustling down the lane of time to future generations with considerable fame attached to it."

"But I won't waste any more time in talking about the matter, I'll get to work at once, so I'll bid you good-by for the present."

The actress warmly expressed her thanks, and the young man withdrew.

"He went up the Bowery," the young man murmured to himself as he gained the street and halted upon the door-step to reflect upon the situation, "but with the start he has I do not stand any chance of overtaking him."

"I must get on his track somehow, though."

"Broadway!" he cried, abruptly, as an idea flashed into his head.

"In New York anybody that is anybody gets on Broadway once a day at the least, and as this young spark is something of a swell, there isn't much doubt that if I haunt Broadway I shall run him down sooner or later."

Then the thought came to the young actor that he was not armed.

"This fellow is a dangerous man, and would be apt to turn on me if he chances to discover that I am on his track, therefore I must prepare for squalls."

Entering his boarding-house, Keene armed himself with a pair of self-cocking revolvers, a beautiful pair of tools of the newest pattern, and then set out for Broadway.

Fortune favored him.

Just above the Fifth Avenue Hotel, sauntering along, ogling the pretty girls, the actor encountered the man he sought.

The chase had begun.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PURSUIT.

KEENE was entangled in a knot of people at the moment when the young man came along, swinging a light cane and puffing a choice cigar, with an air which seemed to convey the

idea that he considered himself to be of as much consequence as anybody on the pavement, and as the actor did not catch the eye of the other, he flattered himself that he had escaped unobserved.

Keene's game was an extremely simple one.

It was his intention to trace the stranger to his lair—find out his abiding-place, and then play the spy upon him in disguise, for Keene was too shrewd to underrate the intelligence of the foe with whom he was to cope withal.

As one of the principal witnesses against the man, it was plain that his person must be known to him, and he could not hope to meet with success if he attempted to work openly.

Keene was satisfied that the fellow was a crafty, resolute rascal and in such cases cunning must be met by cunning.

It was considerable of a risk for the young actor to attempt to follow the man now without being disguised, but so long as the prey kept in the well-filled street, there was little danger of the sleuth-bound being discovered.

So, after Roe passed, Keene halted for a moment to allow the other to get a short distance away and then he turned and followed him.

The game was sauntering along as though he had nothing else in life to do but to haunt Broadway.

He promenaded along the street until he came to Union Square and then at the junction of Fourteenth street and Broadway he halted.

The spy anticipating that Roe was not going any further down the street but intended to turn and retrace his steps, improved the opportunity to take refuge in a convenient doorway, so as to avoid having to run the risk of passing him again, and so affording Roe a chance of recognizing him.

The actor's supposition was correct.

The young man, after halting for a moment on the corner of Fourteenth street, turned and proceeded up Broadway.

Keene shrunk back in the doorway and Roe passed without apparently taking any notice of him.

The actor could not repress an exclamation of delight at the success which was attending his spying; fortune seemed to be smiling upon his scheme, for if Roe had turned abruptly at the corner without halting, most certainly he could not have escaped being recognized by the other, for they would have met face to face.

But as it was Roe was proceeding tranquilly up Broadway, evidently without the slightest fear that a foe was on his track.

Keene allowed the young man to get a hundred feet away again before he started on the trail.

Since matters had gone so well he was determined that no want of caution on his part should betray to the prey that a watcher was on his track.

Up the street the two proceeded until Roe approached the Fifth Avenue Hotel, then as he slackened his pace, Keene became possessed of the idea that he intended to halt in front of the hotel, and join the noble army of loungers who were congregated there staring at the people who promenaded past the building.

So the young actor halted on the lower corner of Twenty-third street, so as to avoid discovery.

And so intent was he on watching the movements of Roe that he did not notice the approach of the stage manager of the Old Bowery Theater, the veteran Charley Buster, who came up in the bustling, fussy manner, so essentially a part of his nature.

It was, as the detractors of the veteran were used to remark, as if the old pump thought himself another Atlas and carried the weight of the world upon his shoulders.

"Aha, Keene, my boy!" he exclaimed, "giving the ladies a treat by displaying your manly person on the Rialto, eh? By-the-by, I've a letter for you, here."

"It came this morning," and he fished it out of the breast pocket of his well-worn frock-coat in company with a dozen others which he flourished with a business-like air.

"That's strange," the actor remarked, endeavoring to perform the somewhat difficult task of paying attention to the stage-manager, and at the same time keep his eyes on the young man who by this time had halted in front of the hotel and was amusing himself by staring out of countenance all the pretty women who came by.

"Strange you should get a letter, eh? Nonsense! you get dozens, and nearly all from women, too, you sly dog!" and the old man gave the young actor a poke in the ribs in what was intended to be a jovial manner.

This statement was true enough.

Like all popular young men on the stage Keene, since his advent in the metropolis, and his success on the boards of the Old Bowery, had been pestered by letters of admiration from silly school-girls and idle women, who had nothing better to do.

"This one, I see, is from a male, though, and

comes all the way from Texas," the old man continued.

"Yes, I have friends down South," Keene replied. "But what I meant by saying it is strange, was, I asked at the post-office this morning for letters, and they replied that there wasn't any."

"Oh, yes, that's a deuced good joke," and the old man laughed heartily.

"You see, I happened to be in the box-office when the letter-carrier delivered the mail, and seeing there was a letter for you I took it along with mine. I expected to see you on the stage, you know, and I thought you would get it an hour or so earlier than if it was left in the box-office."

"But you happened to forget all about it, and so I got it several hours later," interposed the actor.

"Exactly—ha, ha! Quite a joke, eh?" and the old man laughed as if there was really something funny about the matter.

"Well, it may be," responded Keene, who was annoyed by the circumstance, for he did not relish having his mail tampered with after this fashion.

"But the joke isn't an original one with you. You stole it from the comedy of Paul Pry."

"Exactly, exactly—ha, ha, ha!" and the veteran rubbed his hands together in great glee.

"Paul Pry used to be my pet part; it is really astonishing the elaborate notices I have received all through the South and West for my performance of Paul Pry. You would hardly believe it."

"No, I should not," the actor replied, just a little tartly.

And he spoke the truth; he did not believe it, for the veteran was a wonder as far as bad acting was concerned.

A tolerably good stage-director, but an extremely poor hand at acting.

"I remember Paul Pry gets the letters from the postman so as to get them to the house by a short-cut ten minutes earlier, but forgets all about them and carries the mail around in his pocket for three weeks before he remembers to deliver it," the old man chuckled.

"Well, this isn't as bad as that. Ta-ta!" and Buster went on his way down-town.

Being rid of the veteran, Keene was free to turn his attention to the young man again.

And Buster departed just in time, for hardly had he quitted the actor's side when Roe came sauntering down the street again.

Keene was just about to open his letter, but in a hurry he thrust it into his pocket with unbroken seal and retreated to a convenient doorway which chanced to be near at hand.

It was his intention to lie in ambush again until the game passed and then follow after him.

But Roe did not cross Twenty-third street, but when he came to the corner he turned and proceeded toward Sixth avenue.

"Aha! he is on the homeward route, no doubt!" Keene exclaimed, quickly jumping to this conclusion.

And after Roe got fairly on his way, the young actor came from his ambush and followed him along Twenty-third street, keeping on the opposite side of the way.

But when Roe reached Sixth avenue he took a course that for a moment seemed likely to throw the tracker off the scent.

He ascended the steps that led to the Elevated Railroad Station, evidently intending to take a train.

"Does he suspect that he is followed, and is this a dodge to throw me off the track?" Keene asked, communing with himself.

"At all events I cannot afford to be baffled in this easy way, and at the risk of being recognized I must keep at his heels."

So the Actor Detective hastened down the street and ascended the steps of the station.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SURPRISE.

KEENE was just in time to see Roe boarding a car, and by hurrying he succeeded in getting on the same train, finding a seat in the car next to the one that the young man entered.

Luck seemed to favor the sleuth-hound, for as Roe had his back to his pursuer all the time, it was impossible for him to discover that he was followed.

"He doesn't seem to have the slightest suspicion that any one is on his track," Keene murmured, as from his seat in the car he watched the movements of the man whom he was tracking so closely.

"That fact makes my task an easy one compared to what it would be if he had an inkling that his movements were watched."

Roe certainly did not appear to even dream of such a thing, for after taking his seat in the car, he seemed to fall into a brown study and paid but little heed to what was going on around him.

Once in a while he would raise his head and glance out of the car window as though desirous of noting the progress of the train.

On sped the cars.

Station after station was passed until the wild region of upper New York was reached, and yet Roe showed no signs of being near his destination.

"Where on earth is the rascal going?" the young actor muttered to himself in disgust.

"If I thought he had any suspicion of the game I am up to, I should be inclined to the belief he was making this trip for the express purpose of leading me on a wild-goose chase, but as I haven't seen the slightest indication that he has discovered my game, I suppose there isn't any foundation for that idea."

"He may be taking this ride for sport, just to pass away the time, for it does not seem reasonable that he lives up in this out-of-the-way region, still he may do so."

"He is a rascal—I feel perfectly sure of that, and it is possible he has confederates who have a retreat—a sort of a secret haunt—up in this outlandish country."

"That is rather a good idea," and the actor laughed to himself.

"And if the supposition should prove to be true, I shall feel satisfied that I am cut out for a first-class detective."

"It would be deuced odd, and deuced lucky, too, if on my first attempt I should scare up a regular secret band, and immortalize myself by the capture of some prominent ruffians."

"Such an event may be on the cards, and if there is any such piece of good luck in store for me, I will try and do the best I can to deserve it."

The end of the Elevated road was now reached.

One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street!" called out the brakeman.

The passengers rose to depart.

Keene was in no hurry, and not until Roe was on the platform did he move from his seat.

The passengers in his car crowding toward the door concealed him so that he would not have been apt to be seen by Roe if that party was on the lookout for him.

But the young man was not.

He went right on about his business, just like the rest of the passengers.

Once on *terra firma*, Roe proceeded straight to the bridge and crossed the Harlem River, Keene following a safe distance in the rear.

Roe walked on with a steady step, like a man proceeding to a certain destination and tolerably anxious to get there.

"I'm in for a regular adventure," the Actor Detective murmured in delight. "This is no stroll for mere amusement that the scoundrel is taking. It is dollars to cents that he is on his way to some secret headquarters where he will meet with his fellow rascals."

"But even supposing this supposition to be true, it doesn't explain why he should be anxious to kill Estelle."

"There is some dark mystery in her family history of which this fellow is part and parcel, and hang me if I don't unravel the tangled skein before I get through."

After crossing the bridge—the famous High Bridge so well known to all New Yorkers and the strangers who dwell for a time within the gates of the metropolis, and who seldom fail to make a pilgrimage to this classic spot, one of the great sights of noble Gotham—Roe kept straight on, looking neither to the right nor left, until he covered a couple of miles.

Keene lagged discreetly in the rear, for he feared discovery.

The broad, open country road was not like the crowded streets of the city, and if the sleuth-hound approached within a couple of hundred yards of the man he was tracking so closely, discovery would be inevitable in case the pursued one happened to turn around.

Pedestrians were few and far between and if Roe looked behind him he could not certainly help noticing his pursuer.

Keene could easily keep his prey in sight although lagging nearly a quarter of a mile in the rear.

Having been so far successful in his game he was determined not to be cheated out of his anticipated triumph by means of any careless act.

As we have said, about two miles were covered by both pursued and pursuer and then Roe turned abruptly to the left and entered upon a little road which led down toward the Harlem River alongside of which ran the Hudson River Railroad track.

Keene's heart gave a great bound.

"He is bound for the headquarters of some rascal gang!" he cried aloud, "and I must hurry up my cakes now so as not to miss him, for if there happens to be more than one house in the street and he seeks his hole, I shall have a difficult job in ferreting out which house it is."

So Keene mended his pace and went forward at a rapid rate.

But when he reached the corner of the street he became cautious again.

There was a house on the corner around which the fugitive had turned, and as the grounds attached to the house were thickly planted with shrubs and trees, it was impossible

The Actor Detective.

for Keene to see what had become of him until he turned the corner.

Fortune was still favoring the Actor Detective.

The game was still in sight, proceeding leisurely down the street, switching off the tops of the weeds which grew by the wayside, with his light cane as he passed along.

The lane, for it wasn't anything more, being quite narrow in comparison with the main highway, was tolerably straight, although it curved around a little to the left, and so Keene was able to keep his game in sight, and still remain a good distance in the rear.

"Where the deuce is the fellow going?" quoth the tracker in amazement as he noted that there were only a few houses on the lane, all of them near the main road, and all passed by Roe without so much as a second glance.

"What game is the fellow up to?"

Keene was perplexed but still kept on in the chase.

His blood was up, and he determined to see the thing through since he had progressed so far in it.

Roe kept on until he reached the railroad track, and then he abandoned the lane and walked along the iron way.

"Hang the fellow!" cried the Actor Detective, as he noted this new maneuver. "Has he set out on a pedestrian tour with the intention of reaching Albany before he stops?"

"I'll stick to him though, no matter how far he goes!" came with firm determination from the lips of the sleuth-hound.

"I'll back my muscles and wind against his any day in the week, and I can keep the track as long as he can."

Ever and anon, as Keene trudged up the railroad track, the suspicion would occur to him that it was possible the rascal had detected he was being "shadowed," and was leading him off on a wild-goose chase on purpose.

"I'll stick to him though, all the same!" Keene exclaimed.

On went Roe until he came to the junction of the railroad track which runs by the side of the Harlem River with the 11 line by the banks of the Hudson.

Suytenduyvel station was passed, and on went the two toward Youkers.

There's a curve in the ironway between the two stations, and when Roe passed around the curve his pursuer lost sight of him.

Keene did not hasten his pace, for it was a wild and desolate spot, quite a deep cut, and the Actor Detective did not think there was any danger of his prey escaping him by leaving the track.

But when he turned the curve a decided surprise greeted him.

CHAPTER XIX.

WARM WORDS.

THE pursued man had turned around and was retracing his steps.

And he had made such good use of the few minutes that had intervened between his disappearance around the curve and Keene's arrival at the same place, that he was only about a hundred yards from the latter when he made his appearance around the bend.

The Actor Detective was fairly caught, and he didn't see that there was the slightest chance for him to get out of the hobble.

The only thing he could do was to go straight on, trusting that some lucky chance would keep Roe from recognizing him.

"I must put on a stiff upper lip and face the music," Keene muttered to himself when he saw he was fairly in for it.

So onward he went, appearing as careless and unconcerned as possible.

But as he approached Roe he noticed that the other was slackening his pace—he had his eyes on his game, although he did not appear to be looking at him—and he immediately came to the conclusion that the other intended to speak when he came up.

The conclusion was correct, for when the two men got within fifty feet of each other Roe suddenly halted, and with a most decided sneer on his face, said:

"My friend, I hope you have enjoyed your trip!"

Keene's eyes were opened in an instant now, and he comprehended that his suspicions had not been without foundation.

To use the slang of the detective world, Roe had "tumbled" to the fact that he was being "piped," and bad endeavored to give his pursuer a Roland for an Oliver.

It was the game of the Actor Detective, though, to appear as if he did not comprehend the meaning of the other.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" he said, halting.

The two were now only some twenty feet from each other.

"Oh, yes; you're the man I addressed. You do not see any one else around, do you?"

Keene looked up and down the railroad track in the most innocent and natural manner in the world, just as if he believed that the other literally meant what he said.

"No, I do not," he replied.

"Oh, come, stow that!" the other cried, with

a gesture of impatience. "Don't try to come any of that nonsense on me. It won't work. I'm no man's fool, I can tell you; but you ought to know that by this time, that is if you know anything."

"Why, what do I know about you?" the actor demanded, pretending to be greatly surprised.

"You are playing this thing for all it is worth!" Roe cried in scornful contempt.

"I see that you are as good an actor off the stage as you are on, but in this case you are wasting your talent, for I don't appreciate it in the least."

"You mustn't think that you are smart enough to humbug me, for you are not."

"Men with more brains than you have in your noddle have tried that game on me, and not a man Jack of them all ever succeeded in making it work yet."

"Upon my word, sir, you are talking in riddles," Keene remarked, still affecting astonishment. "I have never attempted to humbug you to my knowledge."

"You haven't followed me then clear from Broadway?"

"Followed you! What an idea!"

"It is true, though, all the same!"

"Why should I follow you? The idea is absurd!"

"Yes, I agree with you there!" Roe hastened to exclaim.

"The thing is absurd, and that is the reason why I want to know what you mean by it."

"It is not a pleasant thing for a man to have his footsteps dogged by any sneaking thief of a spy, and when I discovered that you were on my track, I made up my mind I would lead you to some quiet spot, where I would have an opportunity of making you explain your conduct. I am not used to any such treatment, and I am not going to stand it either—I can tell you that, my dandy actor chap."

Not only the words of Roe, but his manner also was insulting, and there was a glint of fire in the clear eyes of the actor as he made reply:

"See here, fellow, you had better be a little careful what you say. I am not used to being abused, and I do not feel inclined to put up with it."

"How are you going to help yourself?" the other asked with a sneer.

"Why, I will simply wring your nose, if you dare to use such language to me."

The hot blood flushed the face of Roe immediately, and he clinched his hands nervously together.

"Oho! you will wring my nose, will you?" he cried.

"I will most decidedly if you dare to address me in any offensive terms again."

"Do you know what I would do to you if you attempted to touch my nose?" Roe demanded, his eyes blazing with passion.

"No, I really do not, but I don't think you would do much, for I shouldn't allow you to have the chance," the Actor Detective replied, coolly.

"I'd drill a hole right through you."

"Talk is cheap, but it takes money to buy land," Keene retorted.

"You'll find that I can act as well as talk, but we're getting away from the subject. You have dogged my footsteps all the way from Union Square out here, and I want to know what you mean by it. You think you are extremely cunning, but in such a matter as this you are no match for me."

"I knew you were trying to play the spy upon me in five minutes after you commenced your dirty work."

"That is the reason why I passed up and down Broadway. I wanted to assure myself that there wasn't any mistake about the matter, and you fell into the trap immediately."

"You have got a deal to learn, my bold actor, before you will be entitled to take a stand in the detective ranks."

"It is evident by your reference to my profession that you know me," Keene remarked.

"Yes, and you know me well enough too, although you are making an ass of yourself by pretending ignorance."

"Your nose will be in danger if you don't curb that unruly tongue!" the actor warned.

"Don't trouble yourself about my tongue; you will have all you can do to take care of your own precious members without troubling yourself about mine."

"I am not in the least afraid of that," Keene replied.

"You are skillful in evading questions, and I see you are determined not to satisfy me in regard to this spy business."

"Not satisfied with attempting to swear me into the State Prison, for you, of all the witnesses, was the one whose testimony bore hardest against me, now you have taken to dogging my footsteps."

"Pray, fellow, do you think you can serve this Miss Estelle by so doing? Is that your little game?"

"The girl herself never put you up to it, I'll swear, for she is a lady and would not descend to any such mean, low, vulgar action."

"You speak in high terms of the woman

whose life you attempted," Keene remarked, thinking it was useless to keep up the deception of appearing not to know the fellow.

"You can't make her believe that yarn, now," Roe responded.

"I've taken pains to see the lady and explain matters to her, and I feel sure she never set you to spying upon my footsteps unless, indeed, she is the most deceitful of women."

"Miss Estelle never asked me to play the spy upon you," the actor remarked gravely.

It was repugnant to his nature to converse about the girl with this fellow whom he believed to be an utter scoundrel.

"I'm glad you do her justice," Roe said, in a lofty sort of way. "And, by-the-by, I have heard rumors that you have been paying considerable attention to Miss Estelle lately, and I want to warn you that you are only wasting time."

"The lady is not for you."

"Suppose we change the subject of conversation. I would rather not discuss Miss Estelle's affairs with you."

"Ah, but that is exactly what you will have to do!" Roe exclaimed, his eyes sparkling with rage.

"I want you to understand that I intend to get that girl myself. We are rivals, and unless you instantly resign all pretensions to that lady, your blood will be on your own head."

"Eh? do you dare to threaten?"

Hardly had the words been spoken when Roe reached for a weapon, and Keene, understanding what the fellow was up to, was equally as prompt.

Revolvers in hand, the two confronted each other.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DUEL.

THE weapons were whipped out in a trice. Both were equally quick, so that neither could boast of an advantage over the other.

"Oho, you are armed!" Roe exclaimed.

"Yes, as you see, and my weapon is a self-cocker, too, so that I have the advantage."

"Not at all! Don't flatter yourself in that way!" sneered the other.

"My weapon is a self-cocker, also, so we are evenly matched, as far as pistols are concerned, but when we come to skill in handling them, I doubt if you are my equal."

"The only way to decide that question, that I know of, is to open battle."

"That is exactly what I propose to do," the other rejoined, as cool as a cucumber, although his face was now very white, and his eyes were flashing with angry fires.

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes, I have watched the course you have been pursuing with Miss Estelle for some time. You have played the lover with her on the stage so often that no doubt you think it would be a fine thing to do the same in private life, but she is not for you. I claim the lady, and I am ready to shed the heart's blood of any man who dares to come between us."

"Then you are really in earnest, and this pistol business is not intended for mere bravado?" Keene asked, hardly able to bring himself to believe that the fellow really meant what he said.

"What do you take me for?" the other demanded. "Do you think I lured you to this lonely spot simply to talk to you? Oh, no; I made up my mind the moment I discovered you were on my track, that the world wasn't big enough to hold both of us, and that is the reason why I encouraged you to follow me here."

"The deuce you say!" the Actor Detective exclaimed, considerably astonished, not only at the intelligence, but at the coolness with which the avowal was made.

"Oh, yes, now that you are in the trap, it is just as well you should understand how cleverly you have been fooled."

And, as he gave utterance to the sentence, the expression of malignant triumph which lit up his face made him look like a demon rather than one of mortal frame.

"I will frankly own to you that it was my intention to kill you outright, without giving you a chance for your life," the young man continued. "Thanks to my self-cocker, I expected to get away with you before you would have a chance to use a weapon."

"But you have slipped up on that little game," Keene suggested.

"Oh, I shall kill you all the same," the other rejoined, in a tone of utter confidence.

"Well, you may, and then again you may not," Keene responded.

"I am a dead shot, and never miss my mark," Keene asserted.

"I'm a tolerably good marksman myself."

"Oh, you don't stand any chance for your life at all," the young man exclaimed, impatiently.

"I will believe that after I see it proved, and not before!" the Actor Detective replied, annoyed at the arrogance of his antagonist.

"You will see it proved soon enough," Roe remarked, with another satanic smile.

"But I want you to comprehend how care-

fully planned is the trap into which you have fallen.

"If you kept your eyes about you during our progress to this spot, you probably noticed that we have not encountered many people, and you kept so carefully in the rear—your idea being, of course, to prevent me from discovering that you were dogging my footsteps—that no one of the few who passed us would ever suspect that we had aught to do with each other."

"I took all possible precautions so that after I had disposed of you no one would be apt to suspect I had anything to do with the matter."

"It was my intention to arrange affairs so that your death could not possibly be tracked to my door."

"By Jove, you rascal! you are speaking as if I were dead and buried already!" Keene exclaimed, enraged at the cool impudence of the man.

"It is only a question of time, as you will speedily discover. The only hitch in my plans comes from the fact that you are better armed and a little quicker with your weapon than I expected, but that does not amount to anything, only that I shall be obliged to give you a seeming chance for your life, when it was my intention, after letting you understand that I had penetrated your game, to slay you without mercy. But as it is now, I shall be compelled to go through the forms of a duel with you."

"Well, I am really glad that you are magnanimous enough to give me some show for my life," the young actor observed in contempt.

"Be good enough to remember that I have told you that you do not stand any more chance of escaping with your life from this duel than you do of fleeing from my hatred by cleaving the air like a light-winged bird," the other retorted.

"After the deed is done and you are food for powder, I shall place you carefully on the railroad track with your head on the rail—an iron pillow, and a rather hard one, but you won't mind it in the least then—and the first train that comes dashing around the curve will make mince-meat out of you, and so completely destroy all trace of the manner in which you came to your death."

"Well, upon my word, you are about as cold-blooded a scoundrel as I have ever heard of in all my life!" Keene exclaimed.

"And then when you are dead, in my arms the beautiful Estelle will find consolation for your loss."

Keene was a practiced swordsman, and as in the first lessons in the fencing school he had been taught to watch his opponent's eyes so as to be able to detect and guard against the coming thrust, so on this occasion he had kept a wary eye upon the glittering orbs of his antagonist, so as to be prepared for an attack.

This trick of the fencing school stood him in good stead now, for hardly had the last word of the sentence escaped from Roe's lips when from the glitter of his eyes Keene detected that the attack was at hand.

Both fired at the same moment, the shots so close together that the two reports sounded as one, and neither had apparently paused to take aim.

But at this sort of "snap-shooting" the stranger was either more skillful or more lucky, for while Keene's bullet whizzed by the person of Roe, coming so near to him that the leaden missile cut a piece out of his coat-sleeve, the adventurer's bullet, more accurately aimed, struck the young actor in the forehead, and with a hollow groan he staggered a step or two and then sunk to the ground.

The shock of the fall threw off his hat—he wore a stiff-rimmed Derby—and a clot of crimson gore appeared in the center of his white forehead, right at the roots of his hair.

"One by one they cross my path and then fall before their fate!" the visitor exclaimed, with a hollow laugh.

Then the rumble of a train was heard in the distance coming up from the city.

"Aha! there is the train now, so there isn't any time to be lost!" he cried.

He sprang to the side of the fallen man and dragged him to the iron rail, resting his head upon it.

"The crushing tread of the iron horse must remove all evidence of the manner in which his life was stolen away!" he muttered, as he arranged the body upon the glistening piece of metal.

"My aim is as good as ever," he continued, as he noticed the blood oozing out from amid the clustering curis which fringed the white forehead of the young actor.

"I have been drinking so deeply of late that I was afraid my hand might have become unsteady, but it isn't so; I sent the ball just where I intended, crashing through his brain so that death might come upon the instant."

Then the letter which the young actor had received from the hands of the old stage-manager that afternoon, and which, not having time to read, he had thrust unopened into the breast-pocket of his coat, caught the eyes of the slayer.

"Hallo, what's this?" he asked, as he coolly plucked it from the pocket of the murdered man.

"A letter, eh, and addressed to my friend here whose thread of life I have been obliged so unceremoniously to cut in twain."

"And it has not been opened either."

At this point the post-mark suddenly caught his eyes.

"Corpus Christi, Texas!" he cried, evidently considerably impressed by the circumstance.

"Well, well, what does this mean?" he cried. "Who can have occasion to write to my gentleman from there?

"I think it will behoove a gentleman of about my size to examine a little into this matter. I may gain some intelligence worth the knowing."

"Good-by, old fellow; you've had a speedy passage to the other world!"

And with this parting salutation to the man he had slain, the murderer climbed up the side of the cut and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LETTER.

THE cut was fringed on both sides with a dense growth of timber, and when Roe gained the shelter of the trees, he was immediately hidden from sight.

The rumble of the train in the distance, rapidly approaching, could be distinctly heard, growing louder and louder as the iron horse sped on its way.

"I'd like to stop and see that scamp of an actor ground to pieces beneath the wheels of the train!" Roe exclaimed, vindictively, as he halted for a moment just within the edge of the timber.

"It is really astounding how bitter was the hatred I had for that scoundrel," he continued. "If I had been inclined to be superstitious, I should have thought it was a presentiment that he was destined to cause me a great deal of trouble.

"As the old astrologers would say, his star ran counter to mine, and one must be extinguished that the other might blaze.

"But that is all over now—he is done for, a dead cock in the pit, and cannot trouble me any more.

"It isn't safe, though, for me to linger in this neighborhood, much as I would like to enjoy the satisfaction of seeing that rascal cut into inch-bits."

So off the adventurer hurried.

As our readers have probably discovered by this time, this fellow who claimed to be named Richard Roe, was an adventurer of the worst type, cruel and unscrupulous, and his motive for attacking the young actor will be clearly developed ere many pages more are passed.

When the murderer emerged from the woodland he came upon a road which he followed to Spuyten Duyvel Station, and just as he arrived at the depot a local train bound for the city came along.

He procured a ticket, boarded it, and soon was being rapidly hurried toward the city.

The car in which he had taken passage was sparsely filled with passengers, and after a glance around him to determine if there was any one within sight who would be apt to trouble themselves about his doings, and coming to the conclusion that there wasn't, he drew out the letter which he had stolen from the man who had fallen before his pistol-ball, and tore open the envelope.

He proceeded with the utmost caution in this matter.

The address upon the envelope caught his eye and he murmured:

"This tell-tale thing must be destroyed; if it was found upon me it might lead to the detection of the murder."

"Men have been hanged by means of just such petty things."

"The game is in my hands, I think, but I must be careful not to throw away a single point."

"A single careless move—a slight misplay, has ruined the chances of even better hands than the one I now hold."

So with the utmost carefulness he proceeded to tear the address from the envelope, and then the piece of paper which bore the bit of writing he divided into three pieces, one piece he deliberately swallowed, chewing it with as much contentment as though it was some sweet morsel.

The second piece he tore into minute fragments, and dropped them one by one out of the open car-window.

The third piece he separated into little strips, and rolling them into little pellets cast them under the car-seats in all directions.

"Now then," he muttered, with a great deal of satisfaction, "the man who is able to reunite those fragments so as to read the address must be a most mighty wizard."

Then he turned his attention to the letter and carefully perused it.

It read as follows:

"CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas, Sept. 20th.

"MY DEAR EDMUND:—

"I delayed answering your letter—received about two months ago—because I hadn't anything really worth writing about.

"And, then, too, I am getting 'into the sere and yellow leaf,' and am not quite so fond of mental exertion, as I used to be.

"Besides, I have been playing poker late o' nights and h'isting bug-juice, like a fine old Texan gentleman, all of 'the ancient time, and the consequence is, I generally rise in the morning with a head on me as big as a bushel basket, and it is only after I have disposed of sundry cocktails and the noon hour comes that I can truly say 'Richard is himself again.'

"But to business—because I have business to write about, and mighty important business too, as you will doubtless say before you have finished this elaborated screed.

"I presume you are aware of the fact that, though my esteemed friend and backer, Joe Yellowbird, is the man who has looked after you ever since your intimacy, yet you have no warmer friend in the world than your uncle who now pens these lines.

"At this point may I beg leave to remark that I hope you will not have any great difficulty in deciphering this scrawl.

"If there is any worse writer than your humble servant to command on the face of this great globe, some showman ought to catch and exhibit him.

"My writing always was bad, but since I have taken to mixed drinks and poker parties, and have to brace up every morning before I can eat anything it is, I am sure, perfectly diabolical.

"But to return to our mutton.

"Though it is now some ten years since you started out into the wide, wide world to seek the bubble reputation, and I haven't had the pleasure of setting eyes on you in all that time, yet the old line fits in here splendidly:

"Though lost to sight, to memory dear."

"As you are aware, of course, there is some mystery about your birth; what it is I have never known, for it is the one secret that my friend and bottle-holder, General Joe Yellowbird, has kept from me; that is, if he knows it himself."

"I have always believed that he did, though I will do him the justice to say he has always protested he didn't."

"But, as Mrs. Hamlet declares in the tragedy, 'Methinks the lady does protest too much,' and the general has always been so strenuous in his denials that it has excited a suspicion in my mind that he has not been honest in his declarations.

"He has always given out that you were the child of a distant relative, and that both your father and mother perished in a yellow-fever epidemic when you were only a few months old, but he always seemed so averse to giving names or dates, or in fact to talk about the matter at all, that the suspicion has, from the first, been prevalent in my mind that the yarn was made out of whole cloth—in fact, that it was a mere dizzy coinage of the general's remarkable brain.

"You will not fail to notice that I have been dipping into poetical imagery quite liberally; the fact is I have been on a big law case for the last week, and a man who can't sling poetry at a cowboy jury ain't worth shucks in this hyer State of Texas.

"In truth my client's case hadn't a leg to stand on, but I filled the rustlers up so full of poetical imagery that they didn't have the heart to wound my feelings by bringing in a verdict against my man, although he had no more right to the stock than I to the chief seat in high heaven.

"You know I ought to have been an actor myself. My early leanings were all that way, and when I hung out my shingle as a lawyer I was a deuced sight more familiar with Shakespeare and the old dramatists than with Coke and Blackstone, and my knowledge has stood me in good part, too, for many is the difficult case that I have really pulled right out of the fire by being able to besog the jury with fine speeches so that the essential points of the matter in hand were totally obscured.

"As one candid foreman of a jury once observed to me after I had procured the acquittal of a man accused of horse-stealing and who was caught riding the stolen animal—

"And to steal a horse is a far more heinous crime in the glorious climate of the Southwest, you know, than to kill a man—

"That cuss was guilty, kurnel, and he ought to have stretched b'mp, and you know it, too, but that 'ere speech w'ot you made 'bout straining mercy through a sieve,' or some sich thing, kinder got away with the boys and we allowed we'd give the cuss a chance for his life, but you jest tell him to git, for you can't work the trick ag'in, and the boyers have bin talking it over and they're going to lynch him to night if they kin git him."

"My client stood not upon 'the order of going,' but scooted, stole another horse a hundred miles to the eastward and was promptly tried, convicted and hung, and all because he couldn't scare up a lawyer able to deliver Portia's famous speech—see the case, 'Shylock against Bassanio,' Record of the Criminal Court, V. nice, volume unknown, year somewhere around 1500 A. D.

"But again I wonder. Old age is garrulous, and though I am as frisky as any old cock of my age in Texas, yet I know I talk too much with my mouth and pen sometimes.

"To resume, ever since you were a little wee baby in long clothes—and a fearful yellor you were, too—I have taken as much interest in you as though you were a chick of my own.

"Your very name comes from me, for when the general asked my advice upon the subject stating that there was good and sufficient reason why you should not bear your family name. I immediately suggested the appellation made famous by England's greatest tragedian Edmund Kean, and in my mind's eye, Horatio, I fancied I could look into 'the seeds of time' and see you, the American Edmund Kean, upon the mimic stage winning the applause of enraptured audiences.

"The general, though, would always insist upon spelling your name K-e-e-n-e, although I told him the man for whom you were named did not spell it that way.

"The general—be it spoken with all due respect—is as obstinate as a mule about some things, and as he had originally written your name in that way, he declined to change."

"I did not press the matter, for upon reflection I saw that if you grew to man's estate, took to the stage, as I fondly hoped, and made a name for yourself as I believed you would, it would be to your benefit to have your name spelt different from the English Keans, particularly as Edmund's son, Charles, was upon the boards, a shadow only of his great father—a name and nothing more."

"You did grow to man's estate—you did become an actor, thanks mainly to my counsel, I believe, and you now bid fair to make a name in histrionics."

"And now to come to the point, after all this rigmarole."

"I think I have obtained a clew to your birth, and if I am right, some five millions of dollars are waiting for you."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TEXAN'S RELIEF.

The young man had perused the letter as rapidly as though it had been written in a hand as legible as copperplate instead of the frightfully bad characters of the old Texas lawyer.

It was plain he was a man of rare accomplishments.

"Aha! this was a lucky find!" he murmured, as he read the sentence with which our last chapter closes.

"Five millions! a sum like that is enough to make a man's mouth water. But let me read this interesting epistle to the close."

"It reads like a romance, doesn't it, my dear boy?" the letter went on. "But I can assure you that it is a sure-enough fact."

"You went North to complete your studies when you were only a mere boy, and I presume that neither the general nor myself would be apt to recognize you now if we should meet you in the street without knowing who you were, but what I was going to say, you will probably remember some of the noted characters who figured in your childhood scenes."

"Can you call to mind a man named Gerald Fitzgerald, a tall, dark fellow with a huge black beard, a cattle-king, who used to come into Corpus Christi once in awhile with his cowboys and make Rome howl?"

"A fellow who was reputed to be the wealthiest man in Southwestern Texas."

"Well, that party is dead—died some three months ago, and left behind him an estate worth at least five millions of dollars."

"The general and myself have been Fitzgerald's lawyers ever since he came into this part of the State, and were probably better posted in regard to his affairs than anybody else."

"Fitzgerald was twice married. By his first wife, a girl of French descent, he had a son."

"By his second wife a daughter."

"The first wife and he did not get on well together; he was harsh and ill-treated her, particularly when he addled his brain with liquor."

"In a more than usually bitter quarrel one day he struck her, and she, enraged at the indignity, drew a pistol and shot him."

"Thinking that her bullet had proved fatal, she fled with her babe, then only a few weeks old, and has never since been heard of."

"Fitzgerald recovered from his wound, and after a short time married again. It is a question whether he ever took the trouble to get a divorce from his first wife or not."

"He said he did, but we, his lawyers, who ought to have charge of the case, knew nothing about it."

"The second wife, after the birth of her child, grew disgusted with Fitzgerald's harsh treatment, and also fled, taking her babe with her, and since that time she, too, has never been heard of."

"Fitzgerald made a will before his death—drew it out himself, despite the advice of the general and myself, who represented to him that a will was a very important legal document, and that a man could not be too careful in executing such a thing."

"But he was as headstrong as a bull, and never even allowed us to examine the document after it was drawn up, though he was gracious enough to vouchsafe some information in regard to it."

"He said he had made the document short and sweet. He had bequeathed his entire property to his daughter. He always had the idea that neither of his children were dead."

"The mothers might be, they were ungrateful wretches, both of them, and deserved to die, but the children were alive."

"He had not even mentioned his son—the child by the first wife in the will at all, and when the general represented to him that that was an unwise omission and would surely lead to a legal contest after his death, he couldn't be made to see it, and all the satisfaction that could be obtained from him was a promise that some day, if he felt in the humor, he might add a codicil to the will giving the son some insignificant sum tied up in the shape of an annuity or condition that he should not attempt to contest the will."

"The young whelp will come to be hanged if he ever gets big enough for the rope!" he declared, with brutal emphasis.

"I know he is my son, but the devil of a mother is in him, and the gallows will be all that he will ever be fit for."

Roe laughed outright as he read this sentence.

"Upon my word! that is the most original way for a father to think."

"But it is only natural though when one comes to consider the matter. He knew that it was he himself who had the devil in him, although he tried to ascribe all the evil to the unfortunate woman who was excited to murder by his brutality, and it was only right that he should believe his son would take after him and so deserve the hangman's rope."

"What a pity that such an old scoundrel should die a natural death!"

And then, with his lips curling in scorn and his eyes flashing angry fires, he resumed the perusal of the letter.

"The codicil was never added to the will, for as Mr. Macbeth truly remarks, 'the flighty purpose never is o'er-crook unless the deed go with it.'

"Death snapped his thread of life in twain so abruptly that he had no time to attend to mortal affairs after the dread warning reached him."

"Nothing has been done in regard to the settling of the estate, for the will, which was intrusted personally to the general's care, has been put away so carefully that I have not been able to find it."

"The general himself started for a tour around the world about three months before the death of Fitzgerald, going by way of California."

"And before going abroad he expressly arranged to 'cut loose' from all home matters, as it is about the first vacation of his life, and so until he gets to England on his return, which will be about a year hence, it will be impossible to reach him in any way."

"But from some memoranda discovered by me in the general's handwriting I have come to the conclusion that at last I have penetrated the secret of your birth."

"You are Fitzgerald's son."

"After your mother fled with you she fell sick, and knowing the general to be a kind-hearted man and one who could be depended upon not to betray a secret confided to his care, especially by a woman, she wrote to him for assistance."

"He went at once to aid her, but was too late. Death had intervened."

"He returned, bringing you with him, and reared you in ignorance of your birth. My idea is that he intended to keep the fact of your existence from your father, until he could present you to him a man grown, and an honor to any parent, and say: 'Behold the son of whom you predicted so much ill!'"

"Now, my dear boy, come on as soon as you can, and I will put you in possession of the evidence which I have gathered, and which to my mind conclusively proves that you are Gerald Fitzgerald's son, with a good fighting prospect to acquire five millions of dollars. (Signed)

"BALDY JONES."

"And the heir by this time has been cut into pieces by the iron wheels, but can he not, phoenix-like, spring from death to life again?" the young man exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DARK AND DEVIOUS SCHEMES.

ROE folded up the letter and carefully placed it in a large pocketbook which he carried in his breast-pocket.

"Let me think—let me reflect upon the situation," he murmured, tapping his forehead thoughtfully with the right fore-finger.

"If I had only had the luck to examine this letter before I placed the body upon the track," he continued.

"But it is too late now, too late to repair the blunder; but then how could I tell that fortune would throw such a chance as this within my grasp?"

"This is one of those strange accidents that no human foresight could foresee."

"Down in Texas this estate, five millions of dollars, waits for a claimant, and the supposed heir, Edmund Keene, the popular young actor, by this time has been cut into mince-meat by a Hudson River Railroad train."

"The account of the accident will be in all the newspapers to-morrow, that is if the body is identified."

"By Jove!" he cried, abruptly, "I never thought of that before. There is a chance that the body will not be identified."

"The wheels of the train may mutilate it so it will be impossible for any one to recognize the remains."

"Fortune in this matter so far seems to have stood my friend, why may she not confer upon me this additional favor?"

"Is it likely that Keene carried any memorandum-book with his name in it, or any letters addressed to him which would lead to his identification?"

"It is just possible that he did not. I am positive there were no other letters in the pocket from which I took the Texan epistle."

"Then if the body should be terribly mangled by the train there is very little chance of its being recognized."

"Stay a moment," he murmured, as a thought occurred to him. "Keene's absence will excite remark and lead to inquiries being made, and in that event, when no traces of him are discovered, foul-play will be suspected, the police will be notified and the dead-house examined."

"The suit of clothes he wore will in all probability lead to his identification."

"Yes, yes, that will be pretty certain to happen if I do not take means to stop it. Luckily I am well posted in regard to Keene, and I will at once set to work to prevent any inquiry being made."

This statement was true enough.

Ever since his release under bail Roe had kept a close watch on Estelle, and as he saw the young actor escort her home every night his suspicions became excited, he fancied that there was a love affair between the two, and so he extended his espionage to cover the young actor also.

By this time the train had arrived at the

depot in New York, and Roe, with the rest of the passengers, alighted.

"I must play a bold game," he muttered, as he strolled along the street, "and it is the only chance for me, and the quicker I set about it the better."

Straight to the actor's boarding-house in the Bowery he proceeded.

He had made himself perfectly familiar with the premises, and when the landlady came to the door in answer to his ring, he explained that he was an actor just come to New York in search of an engagement, and had been recommended to her house.

He had a pleasant, gentlemanly way with him, well calculated to win the confidence of strangers, and the landlady was much impressed with him.

He selected a room right next to the one occupied by Keene, and taking out his wallet asked the boarding-mistress if she could change a twenty-dollar bill, stating that his trunks were in the hands of the expressman, and would be along somewhere around supper-time.

The landlady had no change, but said any time would do.

Roe replied "very well," he had to go out before supper to get some things and would get the bill changed then.

The landlady retired, highly pleased with her new boarder, and Roe was left in possession of the premises.

He carefully locked and bolted the door, hung a towel over the keyhole, so that no one from the outside could play the spy upon him, and then began the work which he had previously carefully planned.

There was a door which opened from this room into the one occupied by the young actor, and that was the reason why he had selected the apartment.

The door that connected the rooms was locked and the key had been removed from the key-hole.

This suited the adventurer exactly. Drawing a skeleton-key from his pocket, he inserted it in the lock and thus opened the door without any difficulty.

There was a writing-desk on the actor's table, and Roe conjectured that in this he would find what he wanted.

There were note-paper and envelopes with the monogram "E. K." stamped upon them, and a letter which the young actor designed to send to a professional associate.

The specimen of the actor's handwriting was what the adventurer most desired to see.

"I never saw a hand yet which I could not imitate," he muttered, with the pride which comes from acknowledged skill, as he drew a chair up to the table and sat down to examine the letter with the eyes of an expert.

"But the keyhole, I nearly forgot that!" he exclaimed, abruptly, as the thought came to him.

"I mustn't lose my game now for the want of a little caution," he murmured, as he rose and covered the keyhole with a towel.

Then he returned to the desk, studied the handwriting of Keene for a few moments, then taking up a pen proceeded to practice.

The actor wrote a common, plain, clerk-like hand, one of the easiest kind for the expert counterfeiter to imitate.

Roe wrote a few sentences and then compared the counterfeit and the original.

The attempt was a complete success.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed; "I have hit it on the first trial as I thought I would. I think it would puzzle even Keene himself. If he was not positively certain, I think he would not like to swear that he did not write these very lines."

Selecting fresh paper, he wrote three letters, which he inclosed in three envelopes.

The first one was addressed to the manager of the Old Bowery Theater, and to him the letter said:

"MY DEAR MR. FREIGHTON:—

"I am suddenly summoned South on important business which admits of no delay, and so I am compelled to leave at a moment's warning.

"I am sorry that I could not give you more notice, but it is impossible.

"It is a matter of a great deal of money, and when I have settled it, I will gladly pay you for any damage that you consider you may have received from my action."

"Yours in haste,

"(Signed) EDMUND KEENE."

The signature was a bold one and so complete a copy that it would have deceived even an expert familiar with the actor's signature.

The second letter was to the boarding-house keeper.

It merely stated that the writer was obliged to go away on business, and begged her to take good care of his things until his return, as the call was so unexpected and so urgent that he had no time to attend to anything.

The third letter was to the young actress, and this gave the adventurer a great deal of trouble.

"If I was only certain of the exact terms they are on, I should be able to know exactly how to write," he murmured.

The Actor Detective.

"If there is a love affair between them, and I do not couch the letter in affectionate terms, she will wonder at it and her suspicions may be excited."

"But then, on the other hand, if they are not lovers, and I write an affectionate letter, she won't know what to make of it."

"In avoiding the frying-pan one may fall into fire."

"The only safety is in adopting a happy medium."

So he wrote:

"**MY DEAR ESTELLE:**

"I am unexpectedly called South, having received intelligence that I have fallen heir to a large fortune. I am obliged to depart in such haste that I haven't even time to say good-by, except after this fashion. Drop me a line to Corpus Christi, Texas, to let me know that you have received this, and I will answer at length, explaining everything."

This he signed, "Yours truly."

"That may mean much or little," he said, with a cunning chuckle.

Then taking precautions to leave everything in the apartment exactly as he found them when he entered, he retreated to the other room, by means of his skeleton key locked the door, and then set out to dispose of the letters.

The one addressed to the landlady he placed upon the parlor table as he descended to the lower story.

The two addressed respectively to the manager of the theater and the young actress he gave a boy a ten-cent piece to deliver at the box-office of the theater, and watched the lad to be certain that he performed the task.

This done he turned his steps to one of the down-town hotels where he had a room, secured his traps and hurried to the Jersey City Ferry.

"Now for Texas as fast as the iron horse can carry me!" he murmured as the boat swung out from the New York shore.

A half-hour later he was in the train and on his way.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORE PRECAUTIONS.

ROE settled down in the car with the ease of an old traveler, and prepared to get all the enjoyment possible out of the journey.

He could not keep his busy, ever active mind though from calculating in regard to the bold expedition he had undertaken, although he did his best to keep from thinking about it.

"It is all right," he kept repeating to himself. "I mustn't allow my mind to dwell too much on one subject or I shall end by going mad."

"That ass of a doctor in France predicted I would wind up in a lunatic asylum, but I will not live long enough for such an event to occur."

"No, no, the moment I find that my senses are beginning to reel—and I am too good a judge of myself not to discover the fact long before any one else does—I will quietly take a revolver and scatter my disordered brains to the four winds."

"Better death—quick death, the Lethe that drowns all remembrance, than a lingering, wretched, miserable existence within the walls of a lunatic asylum."

"But the fellow is a thorough-faced donkey, despite the fact that he is regarded as one of the first doctors in Paris—and that is equivalent to saying one of the foremost in the world."

"Men of my stamp never go mad—it is only shallow-pated fools who lose their wits—what a ridiculous way that is of putting it, for nine-tenths of the lunatics never had any brains to lose."

And then he laughed heartily to himself at what he evidently considered to be a quaint conceit.

But for all his jesting a careful observer would have detected that he had been deeply affected by the warning and was afraid that in time the prediction might come true.

But for all his endeavors he could not keep his thoughts from the expedition upon which he had so boldly embarked.

"Have I taken all possible precautions in this matter?" he queried. "Has everything been attended to that it was in my power to look after?"

And then a thought suddenly crossed his brain which gave him considerable uneasiness.

"I have neglected one important point," he murmured, his brow growing dark at the thought.

"I have not taken measures to be informed in regard to whether the body of the actor is discovered and identified or not."

"That may prove to be a fatal error, for if I go to Corpus Christi and introduce myself as Edmund Keene, and then after I have succeeded in establishing myself, and no one suspects that I am aught but what I claim to be, the news arrives that the body of the actor has been found on the Hudson River Railroad track, all the fat would be in the fire."

"Let me weigh the chances."

"In the first place the Texan town of Corpus Christi is a long way from New York, the means of communication slow and uncertain, and as a

general thing the inhabitants of such a place do not trouble themselves much about the local happenings in a city so distant from them as New York.

"If the body is discovered and identified, and the New York newspapers choose to make a sensation out of it, the articles might be copied by the New Orleans journals and so the news would reach Corpus Christi.

"There isn't any newspaper published in the town, and the citizens must depend upon the Galveston and New Orleans journals for their news."

"I cannot prevent the tidings from reaching the town if the reporters in New York get on the scent, but I can take measures so I will be the first to learn the news."

When the train arrived at Philadelphia, the adventurer was quick to take measures to accomplish this object.

Hurrying to the post-office he sent the money for a month's subscription to three of the leading New York newspapers, directing that the journals be forwarded to Edmund Keene, Corpus Christi, Texas.

"There," he murmured, as he deposited the letters in the post and turned to retrace his steps to the depot, "I think I can depend upon Uncle Sam to bring me the first intelligence in regard to the matter that can possibly reach Corpus Christi."

At the time of which we write, the marvelous enterprise which the news-gatherers now display of flashing all possible topics of interest north, south, east and west, so that the struggling country journal is as well posted on what is going on in the great centers of the world as the metropolitan newspapers themselves, was in its infancy, and the service was not performed one-tenth part as well as it is at present.

This was the only interruption to the journey.

Roe went straight by rail to New Orleans, took steamer from there to Galveston, and at the Texan metropolis boarded a coasting schooner bound for Corpus Christi, which, luckily for his purpose, set sail in three hours after he landed in the town.

Fortune seemed determined to favor the adventurer, for the schooner made an unusually quick passage, having the wind in her favor all the way.

The skipper of the coasting craft was an old Texan and had resided in Corpus Christi many years, and when Roe discovered this fact, he made strong efforts to make himself agreeable to the sailor.

The skipper was a blunt, open-hearted sailor, like the majority of his class, and being of a somewhat talkative disposition, and the young man as expert as a lawyer in putting leading questions without appearing to be endeavoring to extract information, talking merely to pass the time away, so it happened that long before the schooner made her berth at Corpus Christi, Roe was as well acquainted with the town, and as well posted in regard to its inhabitants, as though he had been a resident of the section for years.

And then, after he had extracted all the information possible, he gradually, as if by accident, made the captain acquainted with himself.

That is, he gave the captain to understand that his name was Edmund Keene, and he was the boy who, until he was ten years old, had resided just outside of the town of Corpus Christi, on the San Diego road, under the protecting wing of General Joe Yellowbird.

The fact that the two lawyers lived on a ranch just outside of the town, he had ascertained from the skipper when he had begun his course of scientific pumping.

"Well, now, you don't tell me!" the honest sailor exclaimed, seizing the young man's hand and giving it a hearty shake.

"Why, Lord love you! I've seen you more times when you were a kid than I've got fingers and toes."

"And I sed to myself, sed I, the moment you come aboard the schooner at Galveston, 'It pears to me I've seen the figure-head of that craft somewhar afore.'

"But how you have grown—it's nigh onto ten or twelve years, though, ain't it, since you went North for to git a schooling?"

"About fifteen."

"Dash my eyes if it ain't so! How time does fly, anyway. Say, I heerd it allowed by some of the boys that you had studied for to be a play-acting chap, and was making a heap of money out of the biz, is that so?"

"Well, I have become an actor, but I can't say with truth that I have acquired a fortune in the business."

"Mebbe you'll strike it rich sometime."

The prompt recognition of the old sailor pleased the adventurer, for it seemed like a good omen for the success of his plans.

There was something of a general likeness between himself and the man whom he was counterfeiting, and as no one in Corpus Christi had seen Keene since he was a boy of ten, it was not likely that the imposture would be detected if the game was skillfully played, for the resem-

blance between a ten-year-old lad and a man of twenty-five must be slight.

When Roe landed at Corpus Christi he found that the old lawyer was absent, and he did not return for a week.

In the interim the first copies of the New York dailies came to hand.

One of them in the theatrical intelligence contained a brief item, stating that the popular young actor, Edmund Keene, who had made himself so great a favorite with the Old Bowery audiences, had suddenly quitted the theater, leaving the manager in the lurch with scarce an hour's notice, and that there had been great trouble in finding some one to assume his part that evening so that the performance could be given.

That was all, and not one of the journals contained any reference to any body being found on the Hudson River Railroad track.

"My false letters were a success, evidently, and have completely baffled investigation," the adventurer mused.

"But what on earth became of the body? That is a mystery that may have in it ugly consequences for me."

CHAPTER XXV.

GOOD ADVICE.

AND now we must retrace our steps a little and detail some particulars which transpired in the metropolis and which have an important bearing on our story.

The forged note did not reach the hands of the manager until almost seven o'clock in the evening, and, as a natural consequence, he was furious.

Keene had two important parts to play that evening, and the enterprising Buster, the veteran stage-manager, was put to his trumps to get a couple of actors able to supply the place of the missing man.

The first thing the stage-director did was to hurry down to the actor's boarding-house, expecting to find Keene, and he was prepared to threaten the artist with all sorts of legal consequences if he did not come to the theater and fulfill his duties as per agreement.

But he did not find Keene, and the only bit of information he could succeed in obtaining in regard to the missing man, was from the boarding-house-keeper, who produced the letter, which she never for an instant suspected was not written by Keene, and this convinced Buster that the actor had departed, and by the quickness of his movements had succeeded in placing himself beyond the pale of New York law.

On his return to the theater with the substitute actors whom he had succeeded in hunting up, Buster learned of the letter addressed to Miss Estelle by the young actor, for the people in the box-office had recognized the handwriting of the missing man.

The lady was at once waited upon and besought to give information if it was in her power.

But her letter was to the same purport as the others, as she stated that all it said was he was going away, called by important business.

She did not reveal to the questioners though, that the writer had given an address and requested that she should send a line to him there.

That was a private matter, and she did not think it was necessary to make it public.

Judge Andy, when he heard the particulars of the affair, remarked that it was a bad thig for the theater, for the young actor had become a great favorite, and it would be extremely difficult to find a man to replace him without giving an exorbitant salary, but at the same time, he said in conclusion:

"Although it is a bad thing for the theater, and I would rather have given a hundred dollars t an have it happen, yet personally I am not sorry that the fellow is out of the way."

This remark was made in the manager's private box during one of the intermissions of the performance, and the same parties were present whom we introduced to the reader's notice in the opening chapters of our story, namely:

Judge Andy, the great mogul, his satellite, the weasel-like Mike O'Lynch, the learned, though eccentric limb of the law, 'Corny' McCracken, and the manager, Billy Freehigh.

"I don't exactly understand you," Freehigh remarked, always dull of comprehension.

"Why, I am afraid that the fellow will turn out to be a dangerous rival," the judge explained.

"A rival?" asked the manager, still in the dark.

"Yes; how thick-headed you are sometimes!" Judge Andy exclaimed, impatiently. "Don't you understand that I am after this pretty actress—this Estelle—and, so fa, I haven't been able to make the slightest impression upon her?"

"I haven't been able to induce her to go out to supper, or, in fact, to accept the slightest favor at my hands."

"Now, as far as I can see, the only explanation of the riddle is there is some other fellow in the way whom she prefers to ne."

"Which shows mighty bad taste on the part of the gurl, to say the l'aste," McCracken observed, with a wise shake of the head.

"All women are more or less fools and never know when they are well off," the manager observed sagely, while O'Lynch contented himself with elevating his eyebrows and indulging in a sarcastic smile, thereby meaning to imply that he had a very poor opinion of the beautiful young actress who was unwise enough to reject the attentions of such a man as Judge Andy Fitzgerald.

"I have been watching the way the girl has been acting with this fellow Keene," the judge continued.

"In 'most all these plays they are lovers, you know, and they have got the thing down so fine, I was beginning to have a suspicion, that, maybe, it wasn't acting after all, but they were going on in downright earnest."

Freehigh nodded and looked wise.

"Yes, yes, I have noticed the same thing," he remarked, which was a most unblushing falsehood, for he hadn't done anything of the kind.

"And I had made up my mind to speak to Buster about it, too, for I thought they were getting too cursed real in their acting, and I don't believe in anything of that kind going on in a theater I control."

And Freehigh puffed out his cheeks and endeavored to appear dignified.

"I don't know, of course, that there was anything going on between the two," Judge Andy remarked, "but their actions looked suspicious to me, and as I felt satisfied there was some other fellow in the way, or else she would have been glad to have been more agreeable to me, I came to the conclusion that this Keene was the man."

"I shouldn't be surprised!" Freehigh remarked.

"Keene was a foine-looking b'ye," observed the Irishman. "Jest the feller, ye know, to catch a girl's eye."

"Yes, the rascal had the advantage of me there," the judge coincided. "He was young and good-looking, while I am no chicken and never did travel much on my shape."

"Shure, ye was wise, judge, it wouldn't carry ye far," interposed the Irishman, slyly. Like the most of his race, he could not resist a joke.

"Well, Corny, the men that hang you for your beauty will be guilty of a most atrocious murder," the judge retorted.

"No, boys, in the days when I was struggling upward it was my head and fists that carried me through. But in this matter I guess I will have to own up beat."

"I've done my best to get on the right side of the girl, but so far she won't have it at all."

"Perhaps, now that Keene is out of the way, you will have better luck," Freehigh suggested, encouragingly.

"That may be possible, but I don't take much stock in it," the judge replied, with a shake of the head.

"I say, judge, how will it do for me to try and see what I can do for you?" the manager asked, with a knowing smile.

Whereupon the Irish lawyer set up a shout.

"Oh, tare and ounds! will ye listen to the likes of that?" he exclaimed. "Billy Freehigh's first appearance on any stage in the part of Cupid, and be mighty careful how ye act, or the audience will be shure to belave that it's Stupid instead of Cupid that ye are afther playing."

The judge and the satellite laughed, and even the manager took it in good part, for long experience had taught the lesson that there wasn't the least use for him to attempt to measure wits with the crafty lawyer, for with his dull head he stood no more show against the brainy lawyer than a hawk against an eagle.

"I don't believe, Billy, that you could do me any good," the judge remarked.

"Do good, is it?" exclaimed McCracken. "Faith! he'll do you no good and maybe much harm."

"If I read the signs rightly, this gurl is no common fish that is ready to bite at any kind of bait on any kind of tackle."

"On the contrary she's as delicate as a trout, and the man that is afther catching her will have to do it in a scientific manner. It takes women to understand women: if ye can't make any progress yourself, lay the case before some woman and get her to help you."

"That's a capital idea, Corny!" exclaimed the judge. "But where will I find the woman?"

"Try Miss De Browne; she's an old stager and knows the ropes," the lawyer advised.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A NEW ALLY.

THAT this advice was as sound as a dollar, so O'Lynch expressed it, was the unanimous opinion of all the party.

"Miss" De Browne was an old stager—she had been on the boards and had faced the glare of the footlights for nearly forty years, now, although when dressed for the stage, and

"made-up" with her war paint, she did not look to be a day over twenty-five.

In fact, it is no fable, that many a callow youth who had allowed his fancy to be captivated by the charms of "the beautiful and talented Miss Matilda De Browne, the gifted child of genius," as she was usually heralded in the play bills, and when the green curtain, descending at the close of the entertainment, shut out from his sight, the bright, beautiful and brilliant being for whom his ardent soul panted, as the thirsty deer craves the clear waters of the running brook, he hurried around to the back door of the theater, anxious to see the charmer who had insnared him come forth arrayed like ordinary mortals in commonplace clothes, never recognized the great actress, the surpassingly beautiful woman, in the plain-faced, elderly lady who came forth escorted by the fat doorkeeper, who attended to the main entrance of the theater, the actress's liege lord and master.

It was a decided mystery to these fascinated youths how the idol before whose shrine they were anxious to bow in admiration, ever managed to get out of the theater, as none of them could contrive to see her depart, and it was currently whispered among them that there was a secret passage, deep down under ground, by means of which the lady managed to escape being gazed upon by her youthful admirers.

And the actress, too, as Freehigh declared, had no nonsense about her.

She was perfectly plain and straightforward, a thorough business woman, and as good-natured as the day is long.

"She's just the woman to do the trick, if she takes the notion into her head," the manager observed. "And as she has always been well treated by you, I don't see any reason why she should object to aid you."

"Oh, we're on the best of terms, and always have been so," the judge asserted. "And I have no doubt she will do all she can for me when she understands what it is I want."

"But how does she stand wid the other lady?" asked the lawyer, shrewdly.

"Ain't they in each other's way the l'aste taste in the worl'd, and isn't sich a thing apt to breed a coolness betwix them?"

"Well, generally the actresses who are compelled to share the leading business are at sword's-points with each other," the manager admitted.

"The feeling has gone so far sometimes that they have threatened to slap each other's faces, and Buster and myself have had all we could do to keep the peace, but these two get along like turtle-doves."

"No angry feelings, eh—no jealousy?" the judge asked.

"No, not now. There was a little at first on Miss De Browne's part. She rather regarded the other in the light of an interloper—a younger and more beautiful woman, who had come in to take her place."

"But there was plenty of room for both, as Buster was very careful to cast the pieces so that neither one should interfere with the other, and when De Browne saw this and comprehended too that there wasn't any airs about the new-comer—you see, Miss Estelle is very quiet and unassuming and don't go around as if she thought she owned the whole establishment—she became on good terms with her, and I don't believe the two have had a dispute since the season opened."

"In fact, they dress in the same room now. Miss Estelle asked if her room couldn't be changed, as it was nothing but a good-sized closet, and De Browne who was in possession of the best room in the theater, after the star dressing-room, offered to share her apartment with Miss Estelle, saying that there was plenty of room for two."

"Oh, bedad, they must be on good terms!" the lawyer declared. "And if Miss De Browne will put in a good word for yees, she's jist the woman that kin do it."

"See the illigant opportunities she has, the two dressing and undressing ivery night, and nobody by but their own two beautiful selves."

"Oho! judge, ye must be afther gitting Miss De Browne on yer side if it costs you a small fortune."

"I'll try the game anyway, whether it wins or loses, and as there's nothing like striking while the iron is hot, I'll speak to her in regard to the matter this very night!" the judge declared.

"You'll have a good opportunity, for she is not in the first play and you will have a chance to speak to her without being interrupted," Freehigh observed.

At this point the curtain-bell rung as a signal that the intermission was over.

Leaving their companions to enjoy the performance, the manager and Judge Andy went in behind the scenes.

Freehigh explained to Buster, who came out of his little den-like room on the O. P. side of the stage just as the two gentlemen made their appearance through the door which led to the front of the house, that Judge Andy would like to have a little conversation with Miss De Browne, and that worthy rejoined:

"Certainly, take the judge right in my room; he'll be out of the way there, and I will send De Browne to him."

The stage-director was delighted at a chance to oblige the great mogul, who in reality was the man to whom all the theater looked for their bread and butter.

"She's around somewhere. I saw her a moment ago in the wings all dressed for the next drama."

Buster hurried away to find Miss De Browne, and the judge entered the stage-manager's door and sat down in Buster's arm-chair, while Freehigh departed to take a look at the prompt side of the stage, remarking before going:

"Two is company and three is none, you know, so I'll get out. The subject is a rather delicate one, too, and the fewer people there are around when it is discussed the better."

The judge nodded and mentally remarked to himself that for once in his life the thick-witted manager was guilty of doing a sensible thing.

In a moment or so Miss De Browne came in.

"Good-evening; you are looking as charming as ever, I see," the judge remarked, rising and gallantly placing a chair for the lady.

"Oh, yes, I've got my war paint, and I flatter myself I make up very well for a woman of my age," she said with perfect sang froid.

"When you step on the stage it really looks as if old Father Time had fallen asleep for the last ten years."

"Say twenty and you'll be nearer the mark," she replied.

"No one but yourself would be guilty of the imprudence of uttering such a remark."

"Ob, nonsense! you know better than that. I'm too old a hand to believe such flattery. Try Miss Estelle; she's young and a little green, and may be induced to believe that you mean what you say."

The judge caught eagerly at the chance.

"Try Miss Estelle indeed!" he exclaimed.

"Upon my word I wish I could; but the girl acts as if she were afraid of me, and that is the reason why I wanted to see you. I wish to see if you couldn't aid me."

"Aid you?" and a peculiar expression came over the actress's face.

"Yes, I have taken a great interest in the girl, and I want to become better acquainted with her, and she is such a shy puss that I cannot get anywhere near her."

"Now, Miss De Browne, as you are constantly in company with the lady, I thought that if I could persuade you to put in a good word for me now and then it might do a great deal of good."

"The constant dropping of water wears away the stoutest rock in time, you know, and much may sometimes be achieved by simple means."

"But this is something so entirely out of my line, you know," objected the actress, rising, as if with the intention of putting an end to the interview.

"Now don't be in a hurry, and don't misunderstand my position!" exclaimed Judge Andy, earnestly.

"I assure you upon my honor as a gentleman that I do not mean any harm to the lady."

"My intentions are strictly honorable. I am a bachelor and, as you are probably aware, a wealthy man. I might select a wife from amid the first families of New York, but I am rich enough and old enough to please myself in the choice of a wife, and this girl suits me, I think. Now, if she will give me a chance to woo her, the chances are good that she can become Mrs. Judge Andy Fitzgerald."

"Now, Miss de Browne, do you decline to aid me?"

"No, sir," answered the lady, promptly. "I will do all I can for you, for she's a sweet girl and deserves to make a good match."

And so the agreement was made.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MISS DE BROWNE SPEAKS.

JUDGE ANDY took it upon himself to thank the actress in the warmest manner.

"You may rest assured I shall not forget the service," he said, in conclusion.

"Hadn't you better wait until I perform the service?" she asked with a laugh, as she moved toward the door.

"Ob, there isn't the least doubt that you will be able to accomplish something. So good a general as yourself cannot fail."

"Well, I'll try what I can do at any rate. Although Miss Estelle and I dress together, and so are thus brought much in each other's company, yet I really do not know much about her."

"She is the quietest little puss t'at I ever encountered. She is a perfect lady, and has evidently been excellently brought up, and in fact she is entirely too good for such a rough-and-tumble life as this, and for my part, I shouldn't be sorry to see her get out of it."

"Don't you think she has talent for the stage?" the judge inquired.

"Oh, yes; she's all right as far as that goes, but to get along in the profession something more than talent is required, as a general rule."

"What is the most necessary thing?" the

judge inquired, somewhat astonished by this statement.

"I thought that talent was everything."

"Oh, no; brass is about as useful; brass and a little talent will do far better than no brass and a great deal of talent. I've been through the mill myself, you see, and know all about it."

"If it hadn't been for the natural impudence with which I have been gifted by Dame Nature I wouldn't have been able to make my salt as an actress."

"But you see I always was a cheeky thing ever since I was a little girl; to use the vernacular, I always had gall enough to attempt anything, and I really believe I owe my success to the weight of sheer impudence."

"If any one but yourself made that statement I should most certainly take occasion to quarrel with them," Judge Andy declared, in his most gallant manner.

"You ought to succeed with women," the actress remarked, with a grimace; "you understand the art of flattery to perfection."

"And is that the most important thing in winning women?"

"The world considers it so, and sometimes when I look at the experience of my own life I am tempted to believe that the world is right."

"Oh, no, I think you are wrong about that. The world is apt to jump too hastily to conclusions," the judge remarked, "and is as often apt to be wrong as right."

"Remember, Miss De Browne, you are at liberty to inform Miss Estelle, that my intentions are strictly honorable, and that she need have no fear in permitting me to make her acquaintance."

"You see, unless she allows me to make her acquaintance she will never be able to tell whether she likes me or not, and you cannot become intimately acquainted with a man by keeping him at arm's length, you know."

"That's true enough," the actress observed.

"As I said before, I am a wealthy man—wealthy enough to indulge my caprices without caring for the opinion of other people, and I am free to confess that I have never met with a girl who pleased me as much as this Miss Estelle."

"I have spoken frankly to you, Miss De Browne, because I want you to be able to fully explain to her my position in this matter."

"Do the best you can for me, and whether I succeed or not, you shall have as handsome a bit of jewelry as you care to pick out."

"Well, I'm not proud; I'll take your gift, but you must pick it out yourself—I know you will give me a better present than I should dare to pick out for myself—there's a woman's strategy for you—and on my part I will promise to do my best for you."

The actress by this time was at the door, but the judge detained her with his uplifted finger.

"By the by, I forgot to mention one thing," he said, approaching her and sinking his voice. "It may be merely only a suspicion of mine, but I fancied that, possibly, the reason why Miss Estelle was not inclined to accept my attentions was that this young actor, this Mr. Keene, was in the way."

"Oh, I think not."

"Whenever they had a love scene together on the stage their love-making appeared so real that it seemed as if it could not be assumed."

"Oh, yes, that's the old story," the actress replied, carelessly. "That is what all non-professionals think when they see love-making scenes upon the stage. But with the actors and actresses it is purely a matter of business, and the apparently passionate girl who clasps her lover so tenderly in sight of the audience, would scream like a screech-owl, and scratch like a wildcat if the fellow as much as laid a finger on her off the stage."

"But that is something about the business that outsiders never have comprehended since the stage had a beginning, and I've no doubt they will go on misunderstanding until the drama comes to an untimely end."

And then the actress departed.

By this time Freehigh had returned and finding that the interview was over, conducted the judge back to the box.

"It's a lucky chance for the girl," Miss De Browne soliloquized, as she made her way to the dressing-room. "Judge Andy is one of the big-bugs—that is, he's got plenty of money, although I doubt his statement about being able to select a wife from amid the first families."

"But for all that he would be a great catch for the girl."

"I didn't tell him what I thought about Keene, for it isn't my business to tell tales out of school, but I do think there is a little love-affair between the two, for they were always together in the wings, and I noticed in the dressing-room to-night she was careful to hide his note away in her bosom as though it was a precious thing instead of a bit of waste paper."

"But for all that, though, I'll keep faith with the judge, and do my best to deserve my present."

"If I didn't think he meant honest by the girl, though, I wouldn't open my mouth—no, not if he was to fill it with diamonds!"

As Miss De Browne entered the dressing-room

the curtain descended on the first play, and a few minutes after Estelle entered the room and began to disrobe.

"Let me see, you are through now, ain't you, dear?" the old actress said.

"Yes."

"And you can go home; well, that's jolly! I wish I were you."

"Yes, it is pleasant. I am always glad when I can get home early."

"No Mr. Keene to escort you to-night, though," rejoined the other, with a laugh.

The girl's face flushed immediately, and then she laughed, as if to cover the confusion occasioned by the remark.

"No, no Mr. Keene to-night," she answered; "and I am sorry for it, too, for I shall be dreadfully lonesome, having become used to his company."

"I can get you an escort, if you like."

The girl looked surprised at the suggestion.

"Oh, yes, I can, and a first-class one, too," Miss De Browne continued. "And I will guarantee, too, that there won't be a woman in the house, myself excepted, who won't be mortally jealous."

"Oh, you are joking!"

"No, I'm not," the old actress persisted.

"All you have to do is to say the word, and I will produce the man."

"You are not in earnest."

"He's in the box."

The expression upon Estelle's face changed instantly. She anticipated the disclosure.

"I see by your face that you guess who I mean. It is the judge."

"Yes, I supposed so."

"I had quite an interview with him to-night; he came in behind on purpose to see me, and what do you suppose he wanted?"

"I cannot guess," and from the way she spoke Miss De Browne understood that the conversation was distasteful to her.

But she had promised the judge to do what she could for him, and she was a woman of her word. So she went on:

"He came to get me to intercede for him with you. He is over head and ears in love with your charming self; he's one of the big men of New York, with three or four millions, they say, and he is only waiting for a favorable opportunity to cast himself and his money-bags at your delicate feet."

"In fine, if you'll only give him the chance he'll be glad to make you Mrs. Judge Andy Fitzgerald."

Estelle shook her head.

"Don't the proposal suit?"

"No."

"You like some one else better?"

"I did not say that."

"But you put his letter in your bosom, though."

Estelle turned crimson.

"All right—don't say a word; it's none of my business. I've been there myself. I married my bald-headed old goose when I might have had a dozen young squirts, and some of them with the cash, too; but I didn't love them, and I wouldn't have it."

"Don't be angry with me, dear, because I have discovered your secret. It is perfectly safe with me, and I wish you all possible luck."

"Money is a very good thing, but a woman had better die than sell herself for it."

"Go ahead with your dressing, and if you're lonesome, walk home with hubby and I; we go right by your place, and I'll take an early opportunity to tell the judge that it's no go."

Estelle thanked the old actress warmly. She felt she was a friend who could be trusted.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE TRACK.

AND now we must turn our attention again to the young actor whom the murderous adventurer left for dead on the track of the Hudson River Railroad.

Roe had placed the body on the up track; the warning whistle and the distant rumble and roar of the train notified the adventurer of the near approach of the iron horse, and he believed the train was coming from the city, and so placed the body on the outward track that the rapidly moving wheels might with their cruel edges destroy all evidence of his crime.

His ears had deceived him, though.

To one not used to the peculiar echoes which seem to haunt all railway trains in a rocky region, it is extremely difficult, until the train is close at hand, to distinguish the direction in which it is going.

The train which Roe expected to utilize to do away with the evidence of the murder was going to the city instead of coming from it, and so with lightning-like speed it rushed past the prostrate form of the helpless man without doing it any injury.

The engineer caught sight of the man on the track and remarked to his fireman:

"There's another galoot with a full cargo on board who has gone to sleep with a steel rail for a pillow, and will wake in eternity. Mighty big temperance lecture for you, Jim."

"You bet," responded the fireman. "Number Twenty-four will be along in five minutes, and if

the cuss don't roll off the track he'll be cut into mince-meat, for she's the through Express, and hustles along here at the rate of a mile a minute."

This train was also a through Express and so it was impossible for the men to give any warning to the up train in regard to the man on the track.

And the body had been placed by the acute adventurer in such a natural position that neither the engineer or fireman had the slightest suspicion that the man was not an unfortunate wretch overcome with liquor, who of all places in the world to select for such a purpose had chosen to go to sleep on the railroad track, reckless of the fact that he was exposing himself to certain death.

A short distance below the spot where the supposed drunken man lay, the down train passed the up Express, and the engineer and fireman of the first iron horse nodded to each other as the other train whizzed by them.

"There she is; good-by to the drunken cuss!"

But as there is in this uncertain life of ours many a slip between the cup and lip, and there has never been a truer sentence written than the poet's conceit that the best-laid plans of mice and men oft gang aglee, so in this case fate did not destine that the long train with its merciless wheels should tear the soft flesh and grind to powder the bones of the helpless man.

Just after the down Express passed, down the wooded slope on the east side of the track, about fifty feet below the spot where the prostrate man lay with his body on the rail—for the adventurer, with scientific ingenuity, had placed the body in such a manner that a train could hardly fail to tear it all to pieces—came two men, who, from the way in which they hurried along, were evidently in great haste.

They were thick-set, muscular fellows, rather roughly dressed and with forbidding faces.

A man who had any judgment in such matters would have set them down as belonging to that numerous class common to all large cities, known as "toughs."

One of the two carried a common carpet-bag, rather large-sized and tolerably well filled.

When they reached the track they hurried along in a northern direction, as though there was urgent necessity for speed.

But when they came to the body they halted, casting an anxious glance behind them as they did so, as though they feared pursuit.

"Hello! here's a find!" ejaculated the man with the carpet-bag, who was rather taller and more muscular than his companion.

"Oh, don't bother with it—come on!" replied his companion, who was evidently in more of a hurry than the first man.

"No, no, not till I've gone through the cuss!" rejoined the other.

"The stiff looks as if he would pan out well. He's bored a hole through his head, and then squatted on the track so as to make a sure die of it.

"Look at that pistol! ain't it a beauty?" and as he spoke he stooped and picked up the revolver which had dropped from the actor's nerveless hand and lay by his side.

"Yes, yes, but come on—grab what you like, but for God's sake come on!" cried the other, nervously.

"Don't you know that they are likely to be hot after us by this time? Are you anxious to see the inside of a stone jug jest for the sake of a little boodle?"

"Oh, no; but I'm fly allers to take a leetle risk, if I think the boodle will pay for it."

"The trouble with you, Corky Bull, is that you ain't got no sand, and that's what's the matter with Hannah."

"I've got sand enough," grumbled the other, "but I've got sense enuff to know when I'm well off."

"We've got a good start, and we're likely to git off with the swag, but if we stop to fool around this feller, the fat may all git into the fire."

"Come off! you're losing yer grip!" retorted the other, who was evidently the master spirit of the two.

"I ain't a-going to run away from sich a find as this without going for the boodle, jest 'cause there's a leetle bit of risk to it."

"Jest look at the suit of clothes that the bloke has got on! I'll bet you what you like that they didn't cost less than a fifty-spot, and they'll fit me to a dot, too."

"You can't spare the time to strip him!" the second man suggested, still casting nervous glances behind him.

"Who sed I could, and who sed I was a-going to?" demanded the other, who, as the reader has probably guessed by this time, was a man whose name and person were not unfamiliar to the police of New York.

In fact Bill George, Bill the Smasher, as he was commonly termed, because he first acquired eminence in police circles by indulging in some counterfeiting operations on a very extensive scale, was one of the best-known "cross" men in the country.

He was a man of decided genius, for instead of only being able to practice in one particular direction, like the most of the fraternity, he

The Actor Detective.

could turn his hand to almost anything in the law-breaking line, from the biggest operation to the smallest.

"Ob, no, the boodle is worth some risk, and I'm the boy to try it on," the ruffian continued, with an air of bravado.

"In the first place we've got so big a start that it ain't likely anybody kin overhaul us, and then we've only a few more steps to go, and we kin laugh at pursuit."

"Maybe we ain't got time for to tarry as the song says, but it won't take me a long time to sling the bloke on my shoulder, and when we get him on board we kin pick him as clean as a whistle and take our time about it, too."

And, suiting the action to the word, he stooped, and raising the body from the track, cast it over his shoulder.

"Come on now, and move your trotters lively!" he exclaimed as he strode away.

The other cast another nervous glance in the rear, appeared to be somewhat reassured when he discovered that there wasn't any one in sight, and then followed his companion.

Fifty feet from the spot where the body lay the two men struck off from the track, and plunging into the wood which fringed the iron way at this point, made their way to the river.

Upon a beach a small skiff was drawn out.

The oars belonging to the skiff were concealed in the underbrush near where the skiff had been drawn out of the water.

Bill the Smasher placed the body of the actor in the boat, after shoving it into the water.

Corkey Bull got the oars, then the two men took their places in the craft, and pulled out toward a small sloop looking like a fishing-smack, which was anchored some fifty feet from the shore.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE HANDS OF PHILISTINES.

The acute reader, no doubt, has guessed from the action of the two ruffians they were on a marauding expedition.

The sloop had been procured by the Smasher, and as he and his favorite pal, Corkey Bill, who usually worked in his company, were experienced sailors, having followed the sea in their youthful days, they were enabled to make a raid upon the property of the well-to-do men who were unfortunate enough to live near the water.

The plan of operations upon which these bold marauders proceeded was simple enough.

They pretended to be fishermen, clammers, or New Yorkers out for a yachting trip, as the circumstances of the case demanded.

When they went ashore they spied out the premises which seemed to invite and be worthy of an attack.

Made all needful preparations and under cover of the night descended upon the premises and got away with the booty.

When the boodle, to use the thieves' lingo, was stored away on board of the sloop they hoisted sail and before the morning light came were many miles away.

In this way they baffled all pursuit.

Few of the simple country folks had wit enough to suspect that the men on board of the little sloop had anything to do with the robberies.

So, when the hue and cry was raised, the country for miles around was scoured, all suspicious characters arrested and made to give an account of themselves, every likely and unlikely place searched under the belief that the booty must be concealed somewhere in the neighborhood of the robbed houses, as it did not seem to be possible that the marauders, with such bulky articles as they generally took, could succeed in getting along without being observed and suspected.

Of course no clews were ever discovered, for there were no more traces of the robbers in the neighborhood than if, like denizens of another world, they had flown up through the air, or sunk into the earth.

How could there be when they had escaped by the trackless water?

On this occasion, when we introduce this pair of evil-doers to the notice of our readers, they had departed from their regular plan of operations.

Through a pal, who in the guise of a peddler was making a tour through that part of the country, acting in the interest of Bill and his companion, spying out places likely to be "cracked" without much trouble, they learned of a mansion in that neighborhood which was unoccupied at present, the family being away, and from an indiscreet neighbor it was learned that the family, relying upon the strength of the burglar-proof safe—according to the claim of the maker—had not taken their silverware with them.

This was one of the chances for which the outlaw confederates were "laying."

So, after calculating all the chances, having discovered that the house was well guarded at night by a private watchman paid by the residents of the neighborhood, but that no one troubled their heads about the place in the daytime, thinking that no marauders would dare to

make an attack except under cover of the night, the pals "cracked the crib" right in the open day.

The "burglar-proof" safe speedily yielded to their powerful tools, wielded with the skill of experts.

The silver was stuffed into the carpet-bag, but on leaving the house they unfortunately encountered a curious neighbor who inquired what they were after, and seemed to doubt their tale that they were plumbers sent from the city by the owner of the premises to repair the water-works.

The citizen hurried off, evidently going in search of an officer, not deeming it prudent for him to attempt to personally arrest two such powerfully-built fellows.

And the moment the man turned the corner, the Smasher and his pal took to their heels and did not stop to take breath until the cover of the woods which fringed the railroad track was reached.

Their further progress has already been detailed.

The sloop was quite a roomy little craft, being far bigger than she looked.

There was a comfortable cabin, with a stove, a table, and bunks for four sleepers, and high enough to enable even a well-proportioned man like the Smasher to stand erect.

The body was deposited in one of the bunks, the carpet-bag, which contained the "swag" from the plundered house, and the expensive and carefully-made tools which had obtained it in another, and then the men set to work to get the craft under way.

The skiff was made fast to the stern, up came the anchor, the sails were shaken out, and as there was a good wind from the nor'west the sloop made good headway down the river.

"Now if that 'gilly,' who was so 'fly' as to raise an alarm, comes after us with the cops, I reckon he'll think we're the best travelers that ever struck this section for to get out of the way so soon," the Smasher observed, with a self-satisfied air.

"Oh, we did the trick up brown," the other remarked, at the same time keeping a wary eye upon the shore, for the purpose of seeing whether any anxious policemen could be discerned.

Corkey Bull had the reputation among his associates of always being apprehensive of danger, and, like the weasel, it was a difficult matter to catch him asleep.

He had no just cause on this occasion, though, for fear, for the precautions taken by the rascals effectually baffled pursuit.

The Smasher was at the helm, and Bull sat on the roof of the cabin.

"Now, then, wot's the peppergram?" the latter inquired, after the sloop had gotten fairly under way.

"Well, we've got the stiff on board all right, and so the boodle is ours, and no mistake," the other replied.

"But there's one p'int that troubles me a little."

"I didn't think a pint would trouble you any. I allers reckoned you were good for a gallon," the other observed, facetiously.

Corkey was considered to be the champion wit of the cracksmen.

"Oh, none o' that, give us a rest! This is business, this is."

"Sart'in! old business every time."

"We've got the stiff all right, the boodle is ours, as I said afore, but arter we strip him how are we going to get rid of the carcass?"

"Well, that is something that has got to be considered," assented the other.

"The man committed suicide, of course; there ain't any doubt about that, for if he had been waylaid and got away with, whoever plugged him would have cleaned him out."

"Yes, yes, no doubt."

"But if we don't get rid of him in such a way that no one can trace him to our boat, we would stand a right smart chance of being accused of murder."

"Right you are, Bill!" Corkey declared. "There ain't the least bit of doubt about that. The cops have got a prejudice ag'in us anyway, and they would be cussed glad for to get a chance to lay us by the heels, 'ticularily if they thought they saw a prospect ahead of making us grin through a hangman's noose."

"He's got an ugly hole in his head, and the cops would swear we killed him, and I am afraid they would get the deadwood on us in a way we shculd despise."

"We must git rid of the stiff so that it can't be traced to us," Corkey remarked.

"We want to strip him of every rag, too. His clothes will just about fit me, and I'm kinder seedy in my rig, anyhow."

"I propose that we run down the bay, git outside and cruise up and down the shore until darkness comes on, then we can come in again; the tide will be on the ebb, and we can throw the stiff into the water, and it will be carried out to sea; we'll have the plunder, and there won't be any chance of gitting into trouble on account of it."

"Good on yer head!" the other declared. "I couldn't have fixed a better peppergram myself."

And having arranged the plan the two proceeded to carry it out.

Down the river went the craft.

Past the big city of New York into the bay, great Gotham's pride, so vast and safe that on its mighty bosom the navies of the world might ride.

Through the "Narrows," guarded by the forts with the frowning guns, over the waters of the lower bay, past the well-wooded heights of the Highlands of Navesink, with the trim lights and the low, cedar-ornamented sand-spit known as Sandy Hook, and then the sloop rolled upon the broad billows of the heaving Atlantic.

"Now, then, Corkey, you take the tiller, and I'll strip the stiff," the Smasher remarked.

"All right, my covey!"

The Englishman took the helm, and Bill George went down into the cabin.

But hardly had his eyes rested upon the form in the bunk when a cry of alarm came from his lips.

"Curse the luck, Corkey, the cuss is alive!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXX.

A DISCOVERY.

"Wot's that?" cried Bull, hardly able to believe the evidence of his ears.

"The cuss is alive, I tell yer!"

"Oh, you're dreaming—got the jim-jams, I reckon."

"Nary jim-jams! and if you don't believe me, come and take a look for yourself."

The Englishman lashed the tiller with a rope so as to keep the sloop straight before the wind, and obeyed the injunction.

There wasn't any mistake about the matter, as his eyes told him at the first glance.

The man was not dead; he had only been stunned and was rapidly recovering.

"I don't understand it," the Smasher muttered. "I thought I knew something about istol-wounds, and this fellow has got a hole in his head big enuff to let a dozen lives through."

"Take a sponge and wipe away the blood, so we kin see exactly how badly the cuss is wounded," and as Bull spoke, he opened one of the lockers under the bunks, took out a sponge, squeezed it in some water which stood handy in a tin pail, then gave it to his companion.

The moment the sponge was applied and the blood removed which disfigured the forehead of the young actor the mystery was explained.

The ball from the revolver had not entered the head at all, but had merely grazed the forehead at the root of the hair, cutting a groove in its passage from which the blood had flowed so freely as to lead to the belief—coupled as it was by the instant insensibility of the young man—that he had received a mortal wound from the ball crashing through his skull.

"He'll be all right inside of half an hour!" the Smasher declared.

The ruffian was no mean judge of this sort of thing, and his companion, who had also had considerable experience, coincided in his opinion.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" the Smasher commented.

"Seems to me that you ain't got that boodle so much now as you had," the Englishman remarked, with a grin, enjoying the discomfiture of his companion.

"Well, I don't know 'bout that," the other rejoined, with a dark look at the helpless form of the senseless man.

"You are thinking now, I reckon, that you could settle this cove's hash for this world with a single drive of your knife," Bull observed; being perfectly familiar with his companion, it was an easy matter for him to guess by the expression on the face of the Smasher what thoughts were passing through his mind.

For that matter, on the present occasion, it must have been a dull head who could not have detected what the ruffian was thinking about, for there was murder written on the man's face if it ever appeared on the features of a human.

"It would only take a single slash of the knife," he remarked, scowling darkly.

"In my opinion it was a mighty mean trick for the cuss to play, anyway. To go and play dead, put me to all this trouble, and now come to life. He's no gentleman, or he wouldn't have done such a thing."

"His life is mine, anyway, for if I hadn't sneaked him off the track, the next train would have cut him up into dog-meat."

"I wonder who he is, anyhow?"

And both of the scoundrels peered with searching curiosity into the actor's face.

Then a cry of astonishment came from the Smasher's lips.

He had recognized the wounded man.

Both the pals were great theater-goers, and they managed to combine business with pleasure.

During the play they spotted some man who looked worth going through, and when the theater was out they followed and relieved him of his valuables.

They were good judges of acting, these two, and the young actor was a decided favorite with them.

"Blow me if it ain't Edmund Keene, the actor chap!" the Smasher cried.

"As sure as you're born!"

"Oh, I can't stick a knife in him, you know; it would be like cutting the throat of a brother professional. And say, Corkey, blow me tight! if I don't think there's something wrong 'bout this here business. He ain't the kind of a man for to go and commit suicide."

"Nary time."

"Some feller laid him out now, you bet!"

"And thinking he was killed, put the body on the track to cover the thing up."

"Corkey, you are right now, for a thousand dollars."

"Sav, Smasher, you can make a stake out of the thing, I reckon," the Englishman observed, after a moment's thought.

"How so?"

"I guess Keene is pretty well fixed."

"Yes; I reckon so; these actor chaps make a heap of money, I believe."

"If you take good care of him and fetch him round out of this, I'll bet he'd be willing to stand fifty or a hundred for your trouble."

"Blow me tight, Corkey, if that ain't jest the boss ideel!" the Smasher declared.

"I think it will work."

"Not the least bit of doubt about it, Corkey, and that is a mighty sight better than putting a knife into him. I really hate to kill a man, you know, if I kin git along jest as well without doing it."

"Yes, you allers was a leetle tender-hearted," the other observed.

This was not intended to be sarcastic, but was uttered in sober earnest.

"We must keep him in the dark as to our leetle biz," the Smasher observed. "We'll have to play fisherman on him, you know."

"Better come the yacht dodge," the Englishman suggested.

"These actors are up to snuff, and it isn't an easy matter to fool 'em, you know."

"The best yarn is that we're a couple of hard-working mechanics, and we've got a week's vacation on account of an accident to the machinery in our shop, and we thought we'd try to pick up a few dollars by running out for cod off the Long Island shore."

"Pull a poor mouth, you know, and tell how much we've been put out of our way by having to look after him."

"Yes, yes, that's the game!" the Smasher asserted. "No doubt he'll come down hand-somely."

And this plan they followed to the letter.

Under their skillful care Keene was soon in possession of his senses, but for quite a time he was too weak to sit up.

His whole physical system had received a fearful shock, and his escape from death had been simply marvelous.

An inch lower and the ball of the adventurer's pistol would surely have sealed his fate.

The pals had a plentiful supply of liquor on board of the sloop, and among the stock was some French brandy which they had procured from the cellar of an up-town mansion which they had gone through.

It was the pure article, worth its weight in gold, and this stimulant aided the actor to regain his strength.

Keene received the toughs' accounts of themselves as gospel truth and was extremely grateful for their kindness, and being both flush and free with his money, agreed to give the two a hundred apiece for the service they had performed.

For once in their lives the pals realized that they had made more money by acting on the square than they could possibly have gained by an evil course.

Two days, though, elapsed before Keene felt strong enough to again be around.

And then, in order not to take his preservers away from their course, for by the time the actor recovered the sloop had got well down the Long Island Coast, he had them land him at a fishing-hamlet just this side of Montauk.

There Keene procured a conveyance which carried him to the nearest station on the Long Island Railroad, and then took a train for the city.

During his enforced absence, the young actor had often wondered what his professional associates in the city, as well as the theater-going public of Gotham, thought had become of him.

"I'll put a rod in pickle for that scoundrel of a Roe too," he muttered, as the train bore him swiftly toward the city.

"I've no doubt he thinks I am food for worms by this time."

"He got decidedly the best of me in this first trial of strength, but one trick don't make a game, and he laughs best who laughs last, and I may be able to turn the tables on my gentleman before he is aware of it."

"I have one great advantage now; he thinks I am dead and I am not, so, if I am careful, I will be able to take him unawares."

Arriving in the city, Keene felt fatigued and entered a saloon to get a glass of ale.

A theatrical newspaper lay on the table by which he seated himself, and happening to glance at it, he was amazed to read a full account of his unprofessional conduct, as the critic termed it.

"Now what does this mean?" he exclaimed, in

wonder. "Who wrote those letters, and what was the object to be gained?

"To account for my non-appearance and stop all inquiry?"

"Of course, and this cursed Roe is at the bottom of it, no doubt. The world thinks I am on my way to Texas, and he believes me dead. Egad! I won't undeceive either for the present."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TEXAN GENERAL.

BILLY FREEHIGH, "the energetic manager" of the Old Bowery Theater, as the newspaper critics who were anxious to curry favor with him were wont to term him, stood upon the steps of the temple of the drama over which he presided, in an extremely bad humor.

The veteran stage-manager, the aged Buster, had just reported that he had scoured the city in the most thorough manner and had not been able to discover any actor at all calculated to replace Edmund Keene.

Dozens of the theater patrons had taken the trouble to call at the box-office for the purpose of inquiring when Keene was expected to return, and one and all had expressed their regret at the absence of the young actor.

This was rather a new experience to Freehigh, and he began to come to the conclusion that Keene must be a far more valuable man than he had ever imagined him to be.

"Confound the fellow!" the irate manager exclaimed, "what on earth did he want to run off in this ridiculous way for? Just takes so much good hard cash out of my pocket."

"And Buster, the old donkey, too, declares that I will not be able to replace him without giving some inferior man about twice his salary.

"But I won't do that, no, sir, not if the whole concern goes to the dogs!"

Just as the manager gave utterance to this determination a peculiar-looking old gentleman came up the broad stone steps which ran along the front of the theater.

He was portly in person, dressed well, although his clothes were decidedly old-fashioned in their cut, sported a full iron-gray beard, and wore his hair, which was of the same hue as the beard, quite long.

There was something military-looking about him, and a judge of such matters would have decided that the old man had smelt powder.

"I would like to find the manager of this establishment, sah," he said, addressing Freehigh, and prefacing the remark with a courteous bow.

The old gentleman spoke with the peculiar intonation common to the natives of the Southern States of the Union.

"I am Mr. Freehigh, the manager, sir," that individual responded.

"I am glad to have the pleasure of meeting you, sah," said the old gentleman with another polite bow.

"Allow me to have the honor of introducing myself to you, sah. My name is Yellowbird, General Joseph Yellowbird, sah, of Corpus Christi, Texas."

"Glad to meet you, sir," the manager remarked, although he wasn't, for he didn't take the least bit of interest in the stranger, but when the man finished his speech he noticed that he looked at him as though he expected him to say something.

"I presume that although we have never met I am pretty well known to you by reputation," the old gentleman observed, with that peculiar Southern air which plainly indicated he considered himself to be a man of importance.

"Indeed you are not," responded Freehigh, bluntly, for he had begun to look upon the old fellow in the light of a bore. "This is the first time I ever heard of you in my life."

"You astonish me, sah, upon my word you do," the Texan remarked with great deliberation.

"Is it possible that my boy has never mentioned me to you?"

"Your boy?"

"Yes, sah."

"I don't know him."

"Oh, yes, you do; he's here in your theater."

"No, no, you have made some mistake!" the manager exclaimed. "There isn't any one by the name of Yellowbird employed in the building."

The old gentleman smiled.

"You are quite right, sah, as far as that goes. Although I call him my boy, he doesn't go by the name of Yellowbird. His professional appellation is Edmund Keene."

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Freehigh, "Keene is your boy then?"

"My son by adoption, not my own son. I am an old bachelor, sah, thank the Lord. Early in life I wedded the law, and I have never known any other mistress. I have just returned from a trip abroad, and thought I would call upon Edmund and see how he was getting along."

"You won't find him here," replied the manager, shortly. The annoyance which he felt at the abrupt disappearance of the young actor seemed aggravated by the appearance of the old man.

"No, I suppose not, my dear sah. I am well enough acquainted with the habits of professional people to understand that they do not live in the theater," the general remarked, with a grave and courtly smile.

"My idea in calling was to procure his address from you."

"I can't give it to you."

"No, sir; I haven't the remotest idea where he is at present. He is not connected with the theater now. He took it into his head to run off a few days ago, without so much as taking the trouble to say good-by."

"He wrote me a letter saying he was called South on urgent business, but gave no other explanation, except that if I suffered any damage by his act, he would in time make it good, and I can tell you, sir, it will cost him a thousand dollars to make that good!" exclaimed Freehigh, boiling over with wrath as he thought of the people calling at the box-office to inquire for Keene.

"Really, sah, I do not know what to make of it. I ought to have known of his intention to visit the South if any one knew anything about it. Would you permit me to see this letter of which you have spoken?"

"Certainly. I have it in my pocket now."

The manager took out a handful of letters, selected the one signed by the young actor from the rest, and gave it to the Texan.

"Thank you," he said.

Then he drew from his pocket a specimen of the optician's skill, a single glass in a frame, which looked like an old-fashioned eye-glass, but which was in reality a powerful magnifying-glass.

With the glass he examined the letter in the most careful manner.

"You see, it is very brief and extremely unsatisfactory," Freehigh grumbled.

"Yes, he doesn't say much, and I do not understand it. I suppose there isn't any doubt that he wrote this letter?"

"Of course not!" snarled the manager. "Don't you see it is signed by him? Besides, I know his writing, and the paper and envelope bear his monogram, too."

"It is very odd. Didn't he leave any word of explanation with anybody?"

"Not a word; he wrote to the lady where he boarded, up on the Bowery here, to take care of his things until he came back, and dropped a line, too, to Miss Estele—she's one of our ladies here—to say good-by, but not a bit did he explain matters."

"Well, I am much obliged for your kindness, although I deeply regret not seeing Edmund; good-day, sah."

The Texan bowed and proceeded up the street, while Freehigh rushed into the neighboring saloon to get a glass of beer, in order to drown his annoyance.

Straight to the boarding-house where Keene had resided went the Texan.

Somehow he did not seem to have the least difficulty in finding the house, although Freehigh's directions of "up on the Bowery here" were certainly indefinite enough.

The gentleman introduced himself to the boarding-house mistress, who received him with all possible honors.

Keene was a great favorite with the lady, and she could not speak too highly of him.

Willingly she gave all the particulars she knew of the actor's abrupt departure, and then added that she was never more surprised at anything in her life.

"It was so sudden, you know."

Then he asked to see the letter that the actor had written, and inquired how it had come into her hands.

When he heard that she had found it upon the parlor table, a peculiar look passed quickly across his face.

It was as if he fancied he had discovered a clew to the mystery.

"It would seem, then, as if Keene came into the house during the afternoon, went to his room, wrote the letter, and then departed," he remarked.

"Yes, that must have been the way of it," the lady remarked, thoughtfully.

"I never troubled my head about the matter, thinking it was all right, but now that you mention it, it certainly seems strange that I did not see him that afternoon if he was in the house for any length of time, for I was not out for a minute."

"This is written on his letter-paper and envelope, I presume, as I see his monogram."

"Yes."

"That would seem to imply that he wrote the letter in the house and in his own room."

"Yes; it's odd that I didn't see him, for I went past his room twenty times in the afternoon, and the door was closed and the key missing every time."

"Did any strangers come to see you that afternoon?"

"Yes, there was one," replied the lady, instantly, for the subject was still fresh in her mind, and she had not yet ceased wondering at the strangeness of the affair.

The Actor Detective.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A REVELATION.

"YES, it's very odd," the landlady continued, "and the more I think about the matter, the more I am perplexed."

"A young man came here that very afternoon; he said he was an actor, and had come to New York in search of a situation and wanted to engage board with me."

"He was a very nice, agreeable young man—a perfect gentleman he seemed, and he offered to pay in advance before I had a chance to tell him that it was my rule always to receive pay in advance from strangers."

"But as he hadn't anything smaller than a twenty-dollar bill, and I had no change, I told him to wait until he broke it, as there wasn't any hurry."

"You see I had perfect faith that he was all right, and he said, too, his trunks were in the hands of the expressman, and would be here by night."

"What sort of a looking man was he?" the Texan inquired.

And then the landlady, who had an extremely retentive memory and great natural powers of observation, sharpened, too, by her experience fighting for her bread as a boarding-house-keeper, gave a perfectly accurate description of the adventurer who called himself Richard Roe.

Any one who had ever seen the man and noticed him carefully could not have failed to recognize him by the description.

"Did you give him a room?"

"Yes, and—would you believe it?—after I had come down-stairs, he slipped out without saying a word, and I never either saw or heard anything of him."

"Did his trunks come?"

"Not a trunk."

"What could have been his object in acting in such a way? I do not see as he gained anything by it," the Texan observed.

"Well, sir, it is a regular mystery, and the more I think of it the more I am perplexed."

"If he had stolen anything I could understand it, but not a thing was touched, and if his trunks had come I should have thought that some evil had befallen him, but the non-arrival of the baggage gives a suspicious look to the matter."

"Can I see the room you assigned him? I infer from what you said that he went up to it."

"Yes, and locked himself in, for I distinctly heard the key turn in the lock as I went downstairs."

"I thought it probable that he was tired after his long journey and wanted to take a nap, but when I come to examine the room after he had slipped out, not a thing had been disturbed."

"But come up-stairs, and I will show you the apartment. It is right next to Mr. Keene's room," she continued, as they ascended the stairs. "There's a door leads from one room to the other."

"The man seemed to be extremely particular—I may say notional in regard to his room, and though I showed him another one that is far better than the one he selected, he said he greatly preferred that one."

"No doubt—no doubt," muttered the Texan, under his breath.

The gentleman examined the room with extreme care, and then turning to the boarding-house mistress, asked if she could open the door between the two rooms so he could take a look at the apartment occupied by Keene.

"Certainly, I have the key in my pocket on my key-ring."

The door was opened, and the Texan, entering, went immediately to where the writing materials were kept, the lady remaining in the doorway.

"Just as I expected," he murmured, in a low tone, communing with himself, his words not audible to the woman's ears.

"The pen has been moved from its place; it is not as it was left."

Then he opened the drawer and examined the stationery.

The first thing that met his eyes was the letter to his brother-actor, which Keene had written, but neglected to send.

Roe, in his haste, had not taken the trouble to fold the letter, but had thrust it into the drawer open.

"It is as plain as a pikestaff," muttered the searcher after knowledge, to himself.

"The fellow made his way from that room to this one, and by means of this letter, which gave him the handwriting to work upon, forged the three letters which were designed to prevent any one from inquiring after the missing man."

"He is really a superhuman scoundrel!"

"Where is he now? That is what I must find out. I must see Estelle; possibly I can gain some information from her."

Then turning to the boarding-house-keeper he remarked:

"This is a very strange case, and I must confess I am greatly puzzled by it, but I really cannot understand why my boy should depart in this hasty manner. I will write to Texas to-morrow, and it is possible I will be able to gain some information in regard to the matter."

And then, after apologizing to the lady for the trouble he had occasioned, the general withdrew.

"It is plain," he murmured, as he left the house, "the fellow gained access to the room and wrote the letters there, but how did he gain the knowledge which he evidently possesses in regard to Edmund Keene having friends in Texas?"

"That is a mystery which seems well-nigh incomprehensible, and where is the scoundrel now? Lurking in the city, I suppose, plotting more mischief, but I'll soon be on his track and see if I can't put a stop to his tricks."

Straight to the next house went the general, and when the servant came in answer to his ring he sent in his name, General Yellowbird from Texas, an old friend of Mr. Edmund Keene, to Miss Estelle, and requested to be allowed the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation with her.

He was conducted to the parlor, and in a few minutes the young actress entered.

The Texan rose and greeted her with a courtly bow.

Then he introduced himself just the same as he had done to the manager and to the boarding-house-keeper, and proceeded to explain the business upon which he had come.

Estelle listened without a word; only a tinge of color came up to her pale cheeks, and she seemed to be nervous and excited.

When he had finished, she hesitated for a moment before she spoke, as though uncertain what to say.

Then she arose—she had taken a chair at the beginning of the interview—the general had a most courtly way with him—went to the parlor door and listened attentively for a few moments.

After satisfying herself that there wasn't any one within earshot, she returned, her light figure trembling with excitement, and holding out both her hands to the visitor, said:

"I must speak—I must speak or I feel that I shall choke!" she exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"If you wish me to pretend that I do not know you, I will do so, but it is not the truth."

"You cannot deceive me, even if others' eyes have failed to penetrate your disguise. I know you, and oh! words are poor to express the joy which fills my heart!"

And then the Texan, for a stranger, acted in an extremely strange manner.

Seizing upon the outstretched hands he drew the girl close up to him, and then, with a warm, loving embrace, folded her to his heart, and she nestled there with her head resting contentedly upon his shoulder, as if all her life she had been used to just such a place.

Kiss after kiss was imprinted upon her ripe red lips, and she did not resent the familiarity in the least, but with a long-drawn sigh gave herself up to his embrace.

The earnest reader, of course, has penetrated the secret long ere this.

The Texan general was not the veteran lawyer, Yellowbird, who at that precise moment was eating curried chicken with the dusty natives of far-off India, but the young actor, Edmund Keene, who had adopted the disguise in order to get upon the track of the man who had so wantonly attempted his murder.

The first transports of bliss ended, the maiden, blushing like a red, red rose, endeavored to escape from her lover's arms.

"Oh, Edmund, you must not clasp me so tightly; let me go," she pleaded.

"Yes; provided you agree at some near time in the future to give me the right to clasp you in my arms for the rest of our natural lives."

A faintly whispered "yes," came from the lips of the girl, and then conducting her to a chair the pair took their seats and the young actor explained the reason which caused him to adopt the disguise, and so related the strange adventures which had befallen him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE JUDGE GETS AN ANSWER.

The girl listened with eagerness, so interested in the tale that she hardly spoke during the recital.

"My suspicions in regard to that wretch were correct then," she said.

"And unfortunate that I am, I have drawn you within the range of his anger."

"Oh, don't worry yourself about that," Keene replied. "It is fate that has arranged matters in that way, not you."

"You are but a blind, unconscious agent in the matter. As it is, though, I fancy the rascal in this case has overreached himself: he has arranged a mine, which, when it explodes, will do more damage to himself than to anybody."

"You must be careful of your precious life," she exclaimed, gazing at him with eyes lastrous with the light of love.

"Don't you fret about that," he rejoined, pressing her soft white hand affectionately between his own broad palms.

"Since I have received your promise my life has become doubly dear to me, and I shall not lightly risk it; but I am determined to bring this murderous rascal to justice."

"He is playing some deep game in this matter, although I confess at present I am not able to fathom it, but I will before I get through."

"I have sworn to bring the rascal to justice, and I will assuredly keep my word."

At this point the servant whose duty it was to attend to the door entered the room, bearing the card of Judge Anacoda Fitzgerald and a message from that gentleman that he would be duly grateful if the actress would be so kind as to favor him with a private interview, as he had some important business upon which he wished to see her.

Estelle hesitated, and looked at her lover as though to crave his advice.

"I can guess the nature of the errand upon which he comes," she said, in a whisper, to Keene. "Ever since I have been in the theater he has almost persecuted me with his attentions, and when he found that I would neither go to supper nor to drive with him, nor accept any other of the little attentions which I could possibly decline, he even went so far as to attempt to bribe Miss De Browne to plead his suit for him."

"But she is an honest soul, and when she found that I was averse to the man, she frankly told him—at the risk, mind you, of making a deal of trouble for herself—that he was only wasting his time by trying to force his attentions upon me."

"The judge is one of those bull-headed men, who, because he has been lucky enough to make money, doesn't understand that there are a great many things in this world that money will not buy," the actor observed, speaking in a cautious tone, so that the servant waiting at the door should not be able to understand the purport of the speech.

"He evidently imagined that I would be dazzled by the suit of such a man as he is, for he took pains to tell Miss De Browne how rich he was, and how if I only consented to listen to him, he would give me all the luxuries that the heart of a woman could long for—as if all women in this life were alike and cared only for such things!" and the superb lips of the young actress curled in scorn as she spoke.

"He took particular care, too, to assure Miss De Browne that his intentions were strictly honorable, and painted in glowing colors the proud position which I would occupy in this city as his wife!"

"Oh, yes, the wife of a petty ward politician, who, thanks to his influence with the 'boys,' has risen to the bench of the Tombs police-court, is a great gun in the metropolis!" and the young actor laughed in ridicule at the idea.

"What shall I do?"

"Receive him, of course, listen to his words, and then send him off about his business."

"It will be disagreeable, no doubt, but it is one of those penalties which a handsome woman must pay for her beauty."

"If you were as ugly as a hedge fence, now, you would not be troubled by suitors, and in the mean time I will make myself scarce until he departs," and Keene rose to his feet.

The girl rose also.

"Tell the gentleman I will see him, and please conduct him here," she said to the girl.

The servant withdrew.

"Had you not better avoid encountering him?" she asked, as a sudden idea occurred to her. "That is, if it is necessary for the success of your plans that no one should suspect that you're here in disguise, for he might recognize you."

"Very little danger of that, I think," answered the young actor.

"My disguise was perfect enough to deceive Billy Freehigh, and even Mrs. Cantor, of the boarding-house, next door, who has known and been familiar with me for quite a long time."

"It did not deceive me," she rejoined. "I recognized you almost as soon as I set eyes upon you, that is, I thought I did, and when you spoke I was certain of it."

"It is an old saying that it is a difficult thing to deceive the eyes of love," and he kissed her smooth, white forehead fondly, "and after what has happened to-day I believe there is a great deal of truth in the saying."

"But there, I hear the heavy tread of the judge on the stairs, and so I will get out until he departs."

"I'm sorry that I can't stay to help you bear the brunt of this ordeal, but that is quite out of the question."

Then the two exchanged a warm pressure of the hand—and how the hands can speak when earnest lovers clasp them—and then the disguised actor crossed the threshold of the door just as the ponderous judge made his appearance at the head of the stairs conducted by the maid-servant.

Keene had mentioned the old saying in regard to the clear-sightedness of the eyes of love, but forgot that the prophet also predicts that the eyes of hate were almost equally keen.

And there isn't much doubt that there is about as much truth in one saying as in the other, for even in the dusk of the badly-lighted entry, Judge Andy fancied that the face and figure of the other were familiar to him, and the moment he entered the presence of the actress he referred to the matter.

"Good-afternoon," he said; "I have taken the liberty to call upon you, and I trust you are well."

"Quite well, thank you," Estelle replied, bringing a chair for her visitor.

"Thank you," he remarked, accepting the proffered chair, and courteously waving his hand toward a vacant chair, as if to indicate his wish that she should also be seated.

"Excuse the question, but was that gentleman a visitor of yours?" he continued.

"Yes, sir," she replied, a little apprehensive that the keen eyes of the judge had penetrated her lover's clever disguise.

"I fancy that the gentleman is no stranger to me," Judge Andy remarked, reflectively, "and yet for the moment I am utterly unable to place him."

"General Yellowbird was the name he gave," the actress remarked.

"General Yellowbird?"

"Yes sir, of Texas. The general is a stranger to me, and called merely to obtain some information which he thought I would be able to impart."

"General Yellowbird," observed the judge, and then he shook his head.

"No, I do not know the gentleman. It is an odd name and I should be sure to remember it if I had been familiar with it, yet I would have been willing to have sworn that the man was one with whom I am well acquainted."

The actress contented herself with silence. She saw that the judge was baffled and that he had not penetrated the young actor's disguise.

And now that this matter was settled, Judge Andy proceeded to the object of his visit.

It is hardly worth while to relate at length in all its details the particulars of the interview.

The judge pressed his suit with the vigor of an ardent wooer—told how "well fixed" he was, promised to give the girl all sorts of things if she would consent to become Mrs. Judge Fitzgerald.

Estelle did not interrupt them in the least, but allowed him to go on until he had exhausted his arguments and his prayers, and then in the politest manner possible she begged to be excused.

The judge sought to shake her resolution, but finding all efforts useless, at last departed in a state of considerable rage.

"Hang the minx!" he cried, upon gaining the street. "I was a fool to waste words upon her, when there's Patsy Flynn's daughter, with a cool hundred thousand, would jump at the chance, and the money's good enough if it was made in the liquor business."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BALDY JONES.

Now we must return to the adventurer in Texas, whom we have neglected too long.

In due time Colonel Baldy Jones returned, and in the interim Roe had so fully posted himself in regard to all necessary facts he did not in the least feel the ordeal which awaited him.

Colonel Jones was a most decided character, as the adventurer had anticipated from common report, for the colonel was one of the odd geniuses of the little frontier town of whom all sorts of strange stories are told.

In person the colonel stood over six feet high, was a broad-shouldered giant of a man, though age had begun to destroy the elasticity of his step and bend the once stalwart form.

The lawyer was dressed in a rusty suit of black; the coat cut sack-fashion with deep pockets into which his hands were nearly always thrust.

He greeted the adventurer with the utmost heartiness, and carried him off at once to his home, a rather lonely ranch on the outskirts of the town.

There after remarking that his visitor had grown out of all remembrance the colonel plunged at once into business.

"I needn't ask if you got my letter for your prompt appearance here, at the jumping-off place of all creation—'the be all and the end all here,' proves that you did," he began.

"Yes; I judged the case was an urgent one, and so came on without loss of time."

"That's right—that's right, always catch old Father Time by the forelock. Affairs cried speed, and haste must answer."

The colonel's conversation invariably bristled with quotations, and in nine cases out of ten, the great master-mind of the world, Avon's mighty bard, was responsible for the lines.

"Now to go right at the thing, 'to pluck from the nettle danger, the flower safety,' let me say that I have struck a pretty considerable big trail since I wrote you; 'tis not as deep as a well, nor as wide as a church-door, but it is enough."

"Without bothering you with details, nor the explanation of how I have worked up the case—without explicitly stating what I know and what I only suspect—because there are gaps in the tale which in imagination I have filled up—I will 'a tale unfold.'"

"Go on, sir; I am all attention."

"I am satisfied you are the person I supposed you to be, namely, the child born of the union of Gerald Fitzgerald and Lucretia Esperance."

"Your mother fled from her husband when you were but an infant; 'horsed on the sightless couriers of the air' she dusted, and the ranchero, your father, although he spent fabulous sums in the pursuit, nary trace could be gain, and yet she had not 'vanished, melted into the air,' but

was secreted in the village of — not a hundred miles away.

"She had friends there who sheltered and protected her, but she remained in the strictest seclusion, fearing to be discovered.

"Some eight years she remained there, and as no sign that she was in existence had ever come from her, everybody believed she was dead.

"Fitzgerald, 'in the interim having weighted it,' being enamored of another lady, procured a divorce.

"Went up to the capital for that purpose and rushed the thing through quietly.

"As he had always sworn that his wife was dead, he didn't want to make himself out a liar, for no divorce is needed to free a man from a dead woman.

"Then he came back and married again, but that marriage and the girl, the issue, has nothing to do with your story, which is of the past; she is of the future, and if she lives, you will have to fight her some day to get a share of the millions left by your father.

"Eight years, I say, she remained in this village, and she was taken sick, and it required 'no ghost from the grave' to predict that she was on the road 'to that bourne from whence no traveler returns.'

"Feeling that death was near, she sent for my partner, General Joe Yellowbird—the general always had a sneaking liking for your mother, and if he had only been man enough to 'give sorrow vent' at the proper time, the chances are that you would have been his son instead of Fitzgerald's.

"But that is neither here nor there.

"The general went immediately, and arrived in time to see the sick woman before she 'embarked on that dark tide which rolls all around the world.'

"She bequeathed her child, yourself, to the general's care, and he accepted the trust.

"She died, 'and nothing in her life became her like the leaving of it,' for all hatred had vanished, and she freely forgave her husband for his cruelty.

"After the general had seen her 'decently interred at Chersty churchyard,' he returned to Corpus Christi, expecting to be able to make some arrangement with Fitzgerald about the boy, but upon sounding the cattle king in regard to the subject he found that the father was, if anything, more bitter against his wife than ever, and in this blind, unreasoning rage he included the innocent child.

"The general was wise enough to see that there wasn't any chance of doing anything at that moment, and he must wait for the 'seeds of time' to sprout and grow before he could expect to gain any justice for the orphan boy.

"Then he made up his mind to adopt you, and you were brought here to this house where for fifty years almost the general and myself had kept bachelor's hall.

"But so secret was Yellowbird in regard to this transaction that he did not confide the particulars even to me, his partner and life-long friend.

"I presume he was bound by oath to the mother not to reveal the particulars to any one, for old Fitzgerald had sworn to kill both mother and child if he should ever lay hands upon them.

"It was nothing but an empty vaunt, of course, uttered when the man was under the influence of liquor, in that state when a man is apt to 'say more in a minute than he will stand to in a month,' but it frightened the woman all the same.

"Now you have the tale in a nutshell, much in little—the story of our—your life from year to year."

"I happened to run into this thing by accident and when I discovered that the general had been keeping me in the dark all this time, I just made up my mind that I would try and have a little fun out of the affair myself in order to pay him off, and that is the reason why I wanted you to come down."

"The general, no doubt, has all the proofs in his possession.

"At last I have been able to communicate with him, and I received a letter to-day stating that he is tired of his trip and is on his way home as fast as he can come, and the moment he gets here I'm going to surprise him by stating that I have found the heir to the five millions, and then I will introduce you."

"Ho, ho, ho, won't he be astonished?" and the old lawyer laid back and roared in anticipation of the fun which he would have at his partner's expense.

"Oh, yes, you will have the laugh on him beyond a doubt. But what has become of this other child, this girl?"

"I'll never tell you, as they used to say in Kentucky. No trace of her has ever been discovered, and I presume she is dead."

"Oh, you've got a good fighting chance for a handsome share of the property, if not all of it, despite the existence of the will giving all to the daughter, but you can rely upon the general and myself to bust it. We'll knock it higher than Gilderoy's kite, renowned in story."

"But I say, my boy, there ain't much doubt about your identity, for you are the living im-

age of your father. I should have known you anywhere by your resemblance to him.

"You have greatly changed, though; you don't look a bit as you used to, and your eyes seem to have grown darker, or maybe my memory is at fault, for I am getting old, now."

"I have changed greatly."

"Made a name for yourself on the stage, haven't you? Glad to hear it; it was my idea, you know. I suppose you have had a go at about all of Shakespeare's heroes?"

"Oh, yes."

"Which character do you prefer?"

"Hamlet," answered the adventurer, feeling that he was getting on dangerous ground, and yet preserving perfect coolness. He was not well-posted on theatrical matters, and knew nothing at all of the works of the divine William.

"Good, Hamlet is my favorite! 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother—go on, now, give me a sample of your talent."

"Oh, I can't, my voice is out of order," responded Roe, utterly unable to comply with the request.

"It sounds all right. By the way, did you ever try a hack at the Gladiator? Forrest used to make Rome howl in that. 'I've heard of Rome, how she stood upon her seven hills, the mistress of the world'—now go on."

"Really, you must excuse me."

"You've played the part?"

"Oh, yes, I've played all Shakespeare's heroes." The lawyer looked as if he doubted the statement, and so the adventurer sought to strengthen it.

"Yes, yes, I've played all the principal Shakespearean parts. The last one I essayed was Brutus."

"Oh! you've played Shakespeare's Brutus, have you?" and a very curious expression came over the old man's face.

He was leaning back in his great arm-chair, facing the young man and with his hands plunged deep into his pockets as usual.

"Yes, I was very successful."

"Of course you've played the fool in Shakespeare's Venice Preserved?"

"Certainly; one of my favorite parts."

"Humph! you're trying to make a fool out of me, I guess!" grunted the old man, and the adventurer immediately realized that something was wrong, though for the life of him he couldn't tell what, as he could not perceive that he had made any mistake.

"You have changed greatly," observed the lawyer, after quite an awkward pause. "I don't believe that old Mammy Dinah, who brought you up, would know you, and I feel sure that Uncle Pete, who used to lug you around on his back, never would recognize in such a big fellow as you are the little scamp who was always getting into mischief."

"And the old uncle and aunty are still alive, eh?" said Roe, in the most careless way.

"Oh, yes, they are as much alive now as they ever were!" snorted the old man in disgust.

The adventurer set his teeth together; he realized that he had been caught in a trap and was on the eve of being exposed.

"Oh, yes, very live; they exist as much as Shakespeare's Brutus or his Venice Preserved."

"You're a fraud, young man; you're not the person you represent yourself to be, and now I'd like to have you explain what you mean by this game, and who the deuce are you?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN HIS TRUE COLORS.

THE adventurer saw that the game was up. He was no match in witchcraft for the shrewd old lawyer, but such a master-scoundrel was he, so fertile in expedients, that while the colonel was speaking he decided upon a plan of action—a plan as bold as it was murderous, as the reader will see anon.

"Who am I, eh? that is the question I understand you to put?" Roe remarked, with the most perfect coolness.

"Yes, that is the point, 'stand and unfold yourself!'"

"Then you are perfectly satisfied that I am not Edmund Keene?"

"Not the slightest doubt in my mind on that point," the old lawyer replied promptly.

"My protege is an educated actor, a man who studied his art in the best possible school—the stage itself."

"The general and myself did not waste our money by sending him to some mouthing, mountebank elocutionist, whose only claim to teach the art of acting lies in the fact that he never had the ability to succeed on the boards himself."

"We gave the boy a good education, and then when he got old enough he went on the stage in the humblest capacity, and gradually worked his way as his talents developed."

"He made his way in the ship from the forecastle to the quarter-deck; he didn't climb in at the cabin window."

"And the idea that a man who had fairly risen from the lowest ranks of the profession to the highest grade, should make the mistake of

thinking that Shakespeare wrote Dr. Bird's old tragedy of 'The Gladiator,' or that he was the author of John Howard Payne's 'Brutus,' or the still older work of the ancient dramatists, 'Venice Preserved,' is simply ridiculous."

"Yes, yes, I believe you did catch me pretty neatly," replied the young man with perfect composure.

"Catch you! Well, I should say so!"

"And that shows what an ass a man makes of himself when he attempts to talk about something that he don't know anything about," moralized Roe.

"If I had been wise enough to have parried your infernal dramatic questions about these miserable old plays, and not have pretended to a knowledge that I did not possess, I would not have got myself into a hole. I had succeeded in pulling the wool over your eyes, and if I had not made this unlucky stumble I would not have been detected."

"Oh, yes, you would!" the old lawyer declared. "You played a bold game, and the chances, other things being even, are always in favor of the bold player who is game enough to tempt fortune."

"But I am no chicken, young man; a mighty tough old rooster instead, and in time I surely would have tumbled to your little game," the colonel declared.

"The point in your favor was that I had no reason to suspect that you were aught but what you pretended to be; but ever since I came face to face with you, I have been wondering at the marvelous changes which have taken place in your features, that is, acting on the supposition that you were the person you pretended to be."

"But now that I have grown familiar with your features, I can see wherein you differ from my Edmund Keene."

"You are an older man than he; there are hard and dark lines about your mouth and eyes which betray that you have not had an easy time in your passage through the world."

"You are an adventurer, I take it, a bold and daring one, too, who is not apt to hesitate at any risk."

"Is there anything else that you can read in my face, you man of gigantic intellect?" the other asked, mockingly.

"Yes, there is; there is a peculiar look to your eyes, which I noticed when I first saw you," the lawyer answered unhesitatingly.

"I did not pay any particular attention to it at the time, thinking that it might be caused by the exposure of your eyes to the glare of the footlights; but now that you have thrown off the mask, and are appearing in your true colors; now that you are not playing a part, but allowing the features of your face to assume their natural expression, I can see that the pupils of your eyes have the peculiarity common to wild beasts, of dilating and diminishing without reason."

"And what, pray, most learned judge, do you believe to be the reason for their acting in that strange manner?" Roe asked, betraying a nervousness which he had not before manifested, and forcing a light laugh, which sounded, however, particularly discordant and disagreeable.

"It means that your wits are not quite right, and you are likely, if you escape the gallows, or a violent death, to wind up your days in the mad-house."

"It's a lie!" almost shouted the young man, fiercely.

"And the best proof of that is the fact that I have succeeded in bamboozling you so cleverly.

"If I was crazy, or inclined to be, I would not have been able to do that."

"Young man, the cunning of the lunatic is proverbial," the colonel replied. "And if you know what is good for yourself, you will pay heed to my warning and take care of your wits, or the first thing you know you will find them slipping out of your grasp."

"Look to your own!" retorted the other. "I will live to dance over your grave!"

"That is more than any one will do over yours, for criminals and lunatics of your stamp are buried with such scant ceremony that it is pretty hard work for any one to find their graves to dance on them."

"But I haven't answered your question yet," exclaimed Roe, abruptly changing the subject, for he quickly perceived he could not hope to get the best of the old lawyer at this game of repartee.

"No; but I hope you will, for I am really curious."

"A few words will satisfy you, I guess!" retorted the other, with a demoniac smile.

"In the first place, while I am not your protege, Edmund Keene, the actor, I am the son of Gerald Fitzgerald and Lucretia Esperance, his first wife, and therefore the man who has to use your own words—a good fighting chance for this five millions of dollars."

"You were right when you said that there were hiatuses in your story, and when you undertook to fill up the gaps, your guesses were not always correct."

"I was a boy of eight years at the time of my mother's death at Indianola, and consequently quite old enough to remember all that took place distinctly."

"My mother lived with her half-brother, who was much older than she, a Frenchman with an unsavory reputation, and when she died and your partner came, my uncle scented money, and so when General Yellowbird agreed to do what he could to get my father to receive me as his son and heir, the Frenchman, never doubting for a moment that the attempt would be successful, and believing that if he kept me out of my father's hands a large ransom might be exacted from my sire, took ship for Europe.

"As you are aware, the general failed to move my father from the position which he had assumed, and so the scheme came to naught.

"As I was a bright young rascal, my uncle kept me, thinking he might make me useful in his knavish career, instead of kicking me out to shift for myself, and so I was graduated with all the honors, as accomplished a Chevalier d'Industrie as can be found in all Europe.

"We lived on the fat of the land, my uncle and I, for we knew how to play into each other's hands, and we easily found pigeons to pluck.

"But just about a year ago a misadventure befell us. We had fallen in with and plundered a party of Englishmen, but at the last moment just as we had succeeded in cleaning them out, they discovered that they had been cheated, and like true British bull-dogs, they fell upon us tooth and nail.

"I was alarmed, and did not hesitate to use my weapon, but by an unfortunate mishap my first shot slew my uncle, but being armed with a revolver, I succeeded in laying out three of the Johnny Bulls.

"Then the gendarmes put an end to the fight.

"I was tried, pronounced by experts to be insane, and so saved from death, although condemned to pass the rest of my days in a lunatic asylum.

"From thence I escaped and fled to this country. I thought it high time, as the Old World had become too hot to hold me, to try the New.

"Then, too, I wanted to see how matters were going in Texas. I thought that it might be possible that there might be pickings down there for me in time.

"I instituted cautious inquiries, found that my father had just died and left all his property to my half-sister, who had disappeared no one knew where.

"I was well acquainted with the looks of my father's second wife, for with the curiosity natural to womankind, my mother had procured a picture of the woman who supplanted her.

"Judge of my astonishment when I met the living counterpart of the picture in New York.

"I followed the girl to her home, 'shadowed' her until I learned all that she knew of herself, and became satisfied that she was the missing heir, although she knew it not.

"Now my game is simple enough. That girl is all that stands between me and this five-million fortune.

"I will remove her, and then, thanks to the exertions of yourself and partner, I stand a good fighting chance for this colossal fortune.

"Now, then, you know what I am, and what do you think of me?" and the young man lay back in his chair and surveyed the other with a scornful smile.

"Well, I don't think you are wise to expose your plans as you have, because I shall be obliged to do my best to upset them."

"Oh, I know what I am about. I am more knave than fool, as you will speedily discover," the other retorted.

"This is a lonely spot—no one is near, you and I are here alone. All the valuable papers relating to this affair—the will itself, probably, are in this house somewhere. You are an old man, no match for me, young, resolute, and desperate.

"What is to prevent me from killing you, and at one blow destroy the will and secure the papers that prove my identity?

"Then, as the girl-heir at the North does not know of the treasure that awaits her here, and takes no precautions to protect herself from violence, can I not remove her and so secure all for myself?"

"By the everlasting hills! young man, you are a p'rison sarpint, and no mistake!" the old lawyer exclaimed.

"The only thing that will stop you, that I know on, is the fact that down hyer in Texas we old fellows are mighty suspicious by nature; we don't often let the man get the drop on us if we know it, and as I happen to have a self-cocking derringer that carries an ounce ball in this right-hand pocket, on the slightest sign of violence, I will be compelled to let daylight right through you."

With a cry of rage the adventurer plucked forth his revolver, but the old lawyer was too quick for him and discharged the weapon in his pocket, in the Southwestern style, without taking the trouble to draw it.

The bullet struck the adventurer in the breast, cutting his very heart in twain, and with a single gasp he fell forward on his face, dead.

"The field is burning, Mercy sits on high,
And either he or I must lower lie!"

exclaimed the colonel, as he rose and surveyed the fallen man.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JUDGE ANDY SEEKS ASSISTANCE.

The judge was a decidedly disgusted man when he quitted the apartment of the young actress.

All along, despite the fact that he had not received the least encouragement from the lady, he had not been willing to believe she would be foolish enough to listen to his suit.

His familiar, Corny McCracken, was waiting for him at a saloon on the corner of the next street.

And the moment he came striding into the bar-room, an angry frown upon his brow, his face dark with passion, the keen-eyed Irishman understood that the judge's suit had not prospered.

Judge Andy was frightfully exasperated, and the moment he sunk into the chair, McCracken gave a nod to the waiter, and two glasses of whisky were placed upon the table.

Fitzgerald dispatched his at a swallow, while the Irishman took more time.

"Upon me wourd, Andy, me bucko, ye mustn't trow yer whisky down yer troat in dat way. It will do ye no good, ye know."

"Corny, I'm all on fire!" the judge exclaimed, in a very melodramatic way, leaning over the table toward the Irishman.

"In that case I had better turn on the alarm for the fire-engines to put yees out," rejoined the other, who never allowed a chance for a joke to escape him.

"Curse your nonsense!" growled the judge.

"This isn't any time for jesting. I suppose you can guess from my actions the way the thing has gone."

"She wouldn't have it?"

"Yes."

"To become Mrs. Judge Andy Fitzgerald wasn't any temptation?"

"Not the slightest."

"Well, you see, that is all on account of being on the stage, do ye mind."

"She's got a good start as a actress, ye know, the people do be often saying she is clever, and I suppose the girl thinks that the time is not far distant when she will be after making a fortune by her talent."

"With such an outlook as that, judge, a gurl can afford to take matters airy."

"It isn't like as if she wasn't anything but a sewing or a shop gurl, with nothing but her two hands to depind upon."

"Upon my honor, Corny, my words didn't seem to make the least impression upon her!" the judge declared.

"She was as cold as an iceberg from the beginning of the interview to the end."

"Oh, I tell you, Corny, she played her game like an old stager."

"She was deeply sensible of the honor, and hoped I would not be offended if she was obliged to decline the offer."

"Oho! the gurl is no fool! any man can see that with half an eye," the Irishman affirmed.

"Mebbe she put in that she was wedded to her art and all that sort of thing."

"No, she didn't trouble herself to give any reason, excepting that she only respected me as a friend and was certain that she could never learn to look upon me in any other light."

"Oho, will ye listen to that now!"

"Curse the luck!" exclaimed the judge, fiercely.

"Upon me word it is bad."

"And I never set my heart upon any woman before in my life, although since I have made money I have had love affairs with a dozen, but this one was just about what I wanted."

"Oho, she's a foine gurl; there's no two ways about that."

"And I think it would have been all right too—I think I could have made an impression upon the girl if it had not been for this infernal actor, this Edmund Keene, but it was apparent to me from the moment I saw them on the stage together that there was a love affair between them."

"Yis, but the young actor has disappeared in a mysterious manner, and no one knows where he is."

"I am not so sure about that," observed the judge.

"When I called upon the girl this afternoon, a gentleman was just leaving her and though his face was strange to me, yet there was something about his figure and the way he carried himself which impressed me with the idea that I had seen him before."

"I mentioned the matter to the girl and she seemed as if she didn't care to talk about it."

"Now I have been thinking over the occurrence and the idea has just flashed into my mind that it was the actor, Keene, in disguise."

"Be the powers! that would be odd, but what is the reason why he would be after trying any such game?"

"Oh, I don't know that, the riddle is too deep a one for me to guess."

"You know it is only a vague idea of mine and it may be far from the truth."

"The whim of a jealous mind, me lord!" exclaimed McCracken in a theatrical sort-of-way.

"Yes, that is about it, and I tell you what it is, Corny, I would spend a deal of money and

go to considerable trouble to keep him from getting the girl."

"I wouldn't blame ye in the l'aste; shurel it is only natural," the Irishman asserted.

"But I say, judge, are ye satisfied to take no for an answer?"

"Are ye going to give the gurl up for good and all?"

"Well, I don't know—I hate to," Judge Andy replied with a peculiar sort of glance at the other.

As well as any man living he knew how fertile was the mind of McCracken.

Many a time had he been indebted to the Irishman for some ingenious plan which had bridged the way over a difficulty, and from the manner in which the other spoke, Judge Andy got the idea into his head that McCracken had devised some scheme which could be worked in the present case.

"If you are asther thinking the gurl is worth the trouble, some way can surely be arranged to capture her."

"Not by fair means, though," Judge Andy observed.

"Phat the devil does it matter to yees whether the means be fair or foul so long as yees get the gurl!" the Irishman demanded.

"Well, as far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter in the least, but I must be careful not to get into any scrape."

"Of course, that goes widout saying. Everytning must be managed on the quiet."

"I suppose that Miss De Browne will not be asther doing much to help yees?"

"Oh, no, she takes the ground that the girl knows her own mind, and that when she says no, she means it."

"I have an idea too that she thinks there is a love affair between Miss Estelle and this actor chap, and she is rather inclined to help it on."

"You should have won her to your side wid a big bribe," the lawyer suggested, shrewdly.

"I gave her a fifty-dollar set of jewelry and I thought that woul'l be sure to fetch her, if anything would."

"And phat did she say?"

"Oh, she thanked me—sail it was a sell on me though, for she woul'n't be able to do service enough to pay for such a costly present, but she would take it, all the same, as I had plenty of money and could afford to throw a little of it away."

"It's a mighty smart woman, that same Miss De Browne," McCracken observed, with an approving nod of the head.

"But she had the idea that the game was up?"

"Most decidedly! She said that, in her opinion, there wasn't any use of trying, for it would only be a waste of time."

"She meant a fair and above-board game, of course."

"Oh, yes, you couldn't hire her to do anything underhand."

"Well, if yees can't be asther winning wan way, then ye must try another," the Irishman observed, in a philosophical sort-of-way.

"That is, ye know, if yees are bound to win, regardless of the way the trick is worked."

"Well, I am, if the matter can be so arranged that I will not be apt to get into any scrape if the plan does not succeed."

"Leave me alone for that!" cried McCracken, with a knowing wink.

"I will be the man who will pull all the wires and do all the dirty work, and if there is a smash-up, small hurt will it do my reputation, seeing that I haven't any to s art on."

"Go in Mac and make the running!"

"It will cost yo money, judge!"

"I'll go five thousand on the scheme," observed Judge Andy, after a moment's thought.

"Will that be enough?"

"Oh, that is lashings of money!"

"What is the niture of the scheme you propose to work?"

"Go for the gurl's reputation," responded the other, with an evil grin.

"Get her compromised wid you in such a way that the only chance she will have to preserve her reputation is to become yer wife."

"She is a high-strung gurl, you know, and the thought that all New York will think she isn't any better than she ought to be will be a t to lade her to desperate measures."

"I am going to work though the woman who instructed her for the stage, this Madame Mikella."

"It's knowing to her I am; she has a b'aste of a son who is the devil's own boy; I've got him out of trouble five or six times and the woman thinks she owes me a debt of gratitude, and thin as she has a hard time to git along—for this scallywag son of her kapes her poor—a few hundred dollars will look like a mighty big sum to her, and there isn't much doubt I will be able to get her to play the game I want."

"Go ahead! I am willing to pay the money!"

"I'll commence this very night, and if the trick don't work it will be mighty quare!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ACTRESS-MAKER.

In all large cities—that is cities of the first-class like New York, Philadelphia, Boston,

Chicago and San Francisco, there is a peculiar business which gives a, more or less, good support to the few people who follow it.

New York is the headquarters for this "trade," and can boast of a round dozen at least who have no other business.

To speak of it literally as it is, it is the making of actresses, although the professors of the art, business or trade, whichever you may be pleased to call it, never by any chance speak of it so bluntly.

But, in reality, that is exactly what it is.

Certain people hang out their "single" and advertise in the newspapers that they are elocutionists and invite people who are anxious to go upon the stage to place themselves in their care, they guaranteeing that after a certain number of lessons the aspirant will be fit to play the round of characters to which the pupil aspires.

And a number them go still further, and declare that after the pupil has taken a certain number of lessons they will certainly procure the aspirant an engagement in some good company, and when some young lady—whose friends have declared for years that she was "a born actress and would surely make her fortune if she went upon the stag"—call upon the "elocutionist," who is generally of the softer sex, but in her business as hard as iron for all that, she is received in the most cordial manner, and when she tells of the opinion of her friends, and how, from early childhood, she was always "dying" to go on the stage, the lady declares that any one with the least judgment could see with half-an-eye that she was eminently fitted for the stage, and there isn't the least doubt that fame and fortune lie before her, if she will only deign to take a certain number of lessons and then honor the "boards" with her presence.

The teacher follows this declaration with a "ghost" story—to use the slang of the day—in regard to the number of actresses she had "made."

Carelessly she mentions the names of certain ladies who occupy good positions in the dramatic art, claiming all of them for her pupils, and telling how grateful each individual actress is, because of the excellent training she received from this particular lady.

"And they all admit that if it hadn't been for me they never could have made the hits upon the stage that they have done!"

The would-be actress listens—and is lost.

Soon she is enrolled on the list of the elocutionist's pupils, and her training for the stage begins.

Of course the thing is all a swindle from beginning to end.

The art of acting can no more be really taught off the stage, than one could learn to skate away from the ice, or to swim without going into the water.

A few simple rudiments can be instilled into the pupil, but that is all; the actual work of the stage must be encountered, just as the learner must tumble about on the ice, or flounder in the water, before either skating or swimming can be acquired.

But the trade of actress-making—the pupils are almost invariably of the softer sex, only a few callow youths ever troubling the instructors—is one that depends almost entirely upon personal vanity; the more vain and silly the pupil, the more certain is she to believe that if she can only get upon the stage she will astonish the world.

And it is a well-known fact—well-known to those who ply the trade, although they are seldom honest enough to admit it—that the more unsuited a pupil is for a dramatic life by reason of an entire lack of all necessary requirements, the more anxious she is to get on the stage, and the readier to pay whatever sums may be demanded.

And it is from weak and silly pupils of this kind that the "actress-maker" derives the greater part of her gains.

From the intelligent and sensible girl she cannot profit much, because after a certain time the pupil grows tired of the teaching and longs to try the actual life, and if she has any push and go-aheadiveness, she seeks the manager of some company, tells what she wants, and usually succeeds in getting a position.

Not the one which she had been led to expect would be open to her by the flattering words of her teacher.

The manager hasn't any room for a "Juliet" or a "Pauline" at two or three hundred dollars a week, but if the lady will be content with five dollars and her board and traveling expenses, to play minor rôles—very minor, indeed, as a rule—possibly there may be a chance.

Of course the high-flown young lady, eaten up by vanity, and having full faith in the "yarns" of her teacher, turns up her nose at such an opportunity as this.

Really the chance is open of becoming an actress in earnest, and receive pay for being taught, instead of paying at the rate of a dollar or two the hour for lessons of no earthly use.

She waits for the manager who will take the word of his teacher that she is a wonderful actress and who will risk his money to give her the opportunity to astonish the public.

It is hardly necessary, I suppose, to state that

to nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand this good angel of a manager never comes.

The young ladies who have bounded upon the stage, fresh from the hands of the actress-maker, and at once clutched fame and fortune, can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and in order to find as many as that, one must go back in the history of the drama for forty years at least.

The lady of whom we set out to speak in this chapter, Madame Mikella, was a fair example of the actress-makers, although a trifle more honest than the majority of those who made a living by this odd profession.

But as she herself said:

"It does not pay to be too honest."

"If I were to tell my pupils the truth I should lose two-thirds of them immediately."

"There is Miss Bertie Van Gooselem, the daughter of the Avenue A butcher, who has made a fortune by selling poor meat and giving bad weight to the miserable, struggling poor who buy by the ten cents' worth.

"Her father is as mean a man as ever grasped a quarter until the eagle screams, and, although he has plenty of money and owns no end of houses all over New York, still lives in the first floor of the tenement house just as he did when he ceased to be a journeyman butcher and started out on his own account.

"But, as both father and daughter have got the idea that Bertie will just coin money if she goes on the stage, they are willing to pay liberally for her training.

"Now, suppose I should say to this girl, who is no more fitted for the stage than I am to ride a horseback act in the circus, 'You have no talent for the stage, my dear, and there isn't any use of your throwing away your money.'

"Not only that, but even if you had talent, your face, figure and voice are so much against you that it would only be the height of folly for you to hope to succeed in the line of characters to which you aspire.

"You are entirely too fat for Juliet, or any of the young and interesting characters of that nature."

"The girl stands about five feet high and weighs over a hundred and fifty pounds, with a face as round as a Dutch cheese and about as much expression to it.

"Then she has one of those disagreeable rasping, creaky voices, which remind the hearer of the noise of a band-saw in active operation, and, to crown all, she has a funny little lisp.

"Now, as I said, suppose I told Miss Bertie the truth?

"She wouldn't believe me. Not at all! She would become violently angry, all her friends would declare that I didn't know what I was talking about, and I should lose a pupil worth three dollars a week to me.

"My plain speaking wouldn't cure her of her infatuation at all, either; even when a bad case of this kind tries the stage, and is guyed and laughed at by the audience, no cure is effected; half the time they believe the guying to be genuine applause, and if so rough that it is not possible for them to take this view of it, then they ascribe the guy to the malice of some of the other performers whom they affect to believe to be jealous of their abilities, and they think these jealous ones have sent their friends to the front of the house expressly to kick up a disturbance.

"The girl would merely leave me and go to some other teacher, who would take her money without going to the trouble to tell her that she was throwing it away.

"Therefore, as I said in the beginning, it sometimes does not pay one in this world to be too honest."

And this was the woman whom the wily Irishman, Corny McCracken, had selected as a tool, by means of whom the young actress, Miss Estelle, might be induced to look with a favorable eye upon the suit of Judge Andy Fitzgerald.

Madame Mikella's life had been rather an eventful one.

She came of a good New York family, had been somewhat of a belle in her youth, and at an early age married a young merchant who was doing a prosperous business.

Keller was the gentleman's name, and for the first ten years after his marriage his wife held her head high as one of the notable dames of the metropolis.

Particularly in private theatricals was she famed, and her friends all declared she would make her fortune if she should go on the stage.

For ten years all went well with the Kellers, and then came one of the destructive panics which every few years sweep over the country with the fury of a hurricane.

Keller's business was prostrated by the shock, and in the ruin were engulfed nearly all his own and his wife's relatives.

The stroke killed the man, for the merchant was not strong, and the overwork and anxiety was too much for him.

Tbrown upon the world, utterly helpless, was the wife with her boy of tender years.

In this emergency she tried the profession in which it had so many times been predicted she would be so successful.

She went on the stage.

But although she got along very well, yet as she had neither the youth, beauty and talent required for a star, she made no fortune, only a living.

In time she drifted into the teaching business and soon found that it was equally as profitable as acting, and far more pleasant, so she gave up acting and settled down as a teacher.

That is, the woman who never set the river on fire herself set out to show others how to do it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BARGAIN.

The madame—she had Frenchified her name when she adopted a public career under the belief that it would add to her success, as the opera singers invariably do, plain Johny Clark being transformed into Signor Clarkini—was a prudent, saving sort of a woman, and she would have got along very well if it had not been for the fact that she was unfortunate enough to possess a scapegrace son.

For the sake of her boy she had gone upon the stage—for his sake she had fought the battle of life with an undaunted heart, and now, when old age was gradually stealing upon her, the boy who should have been a comfort was just the reverse.

He was a young man of twenty-five at this time, not particularly bad, but wild and unmanageable.

His associates were none of the best, and on three or four occasions he had come pretty near getting into serious trouble on account of being found in the company of fellows whose pictures adorned the Rogues' Gallery at Police Headquarters.

When her son had first got into trouble, in her perplexity, the madame had sought the advice of Charley Buster, the stage manager of the Old Bowery, who was an ancient friend of hers, and that gentleman, being well acquainted with McCracken, and knowing his reputation, immediately introduced the madame to him.

The Irish lawyer was peculiarly responsive to all appeals of this kind, for he himself had once possessed a brother so much younger than he that he seemed to be more of a father to the boy than a brother.

Despite the care that his elder brother exercised over him though, the young man went to the bad, and was finally killed in a drunken brawl by one of his ruffianly associates.

McCracken had managed to get the madame's son out of some scrapes which at the time looked as if they would turn out to be pretty serious matters. He never charged the mother much if anything for the services he rendered, and as she was ever liberal in the expression of her gratitude he thought he would be able to get her to aid him in his scheme, particularly as she would make a good bit of money by it.

After coming to an understanding with the judge, McCracken lost no time in calling upon Madame Mikella.

She occupied a "flat" in one of the up-town cross streets, near Broadway, and right in the heart of the theatrical region, that is, the locality where the theaters abound and where theatrical people are to be found.

The madame was at home and received the lawyer in the most gracious manner.

"Well, how is Billy getting along?" was the first thing that McCracken said after being seated.

"The mother heaved a sigh.

"Well, Mr. McCracken, to tell you the truth he is not getting along very well."

"He has not yet succeeded in finding a place to suit him, and while he is idle, I always am apprehensive, for, you know, there is a deal of truth in the old saying that Satan always finds work for idle hands to do."

"Yes, there isn't much doubt about that."

"Now, I was thinking about Billy the other day," the lawyer continued.

"He is a fine spirited lad, and half the time he gets into trouble just because he hasn't enough to do."

"If his mind was fully occupied by business I think he would be as straight as a string."

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Now the thing is, he ought to be after having a business of his own."

"Oh, yes, it is easy to say that, Mr. McCracken, but where is the money to come from?"

"A business that will pay money doesn't grow on every bush, you know."

"A thousand dollars would go a long way to starting a young man like Billy in some good business, do you mind?" McCracken remarked, in a reflective sort of way.

"A thousand dollars!" the madame exclaimed. "Yes, I should think it would, but where is the thousand dollars to come from? That is what I would like to know."

"Well, you make a pretty good thing of it out of your pupils," the lawyer remarked, surveying, with the air of a critic, the well-furnished apartment.

"I make a good living, but that is all," the lady replied.

"It is not so good now as it used to be, for there are too many in the business."

"I did have quite a good bit of money saved, but Billy, with his wild scrapes, has cost me a great deal of money, and I haven't much left now."

"I think I know where you can put your hand on a thousand dollars, if you choose to earn it," McCracken remarked, speaking as carelessly as though he was talking of cents instead of dollars.

"Do you mean it?" exclaimed the madame, anxiously.

"Indeed I do, and the thousand dollars will start Billy in some good business, so that he will not be any more trouble to yeess."

"Oh, wouldn't that be perfectly splendid!" the troubled mother exclaimed.

"But, my dear Madame Mikella, I will not attempt to conceal from yeess that the service you are to perform, and for which a thousand dollars will be paid, isn't what could be explained in the high street at noonday."

A cloud came over the face of the madame, and she heaved a deep sigh.

"No, I suppose not," she murmured.

"I was foolish not to think of that. I might have known that a thousand dollars couldn't be picked up so easily."

"The service is a peculiar one—it might be called a bit of secret service; not particularly honorable, nor yet a piece of work which would get any one into jail."

"Yes, yes, I see," and the madame nodded and looked wise.

"But I will not deal in riddles but come at once to an explanation of the business and thin you will know all about it."

"Miss Estelle, now playing at the Old Bowery Theater, was a pupil of yours?"

"Yes."

"And you are on good terms with her?"

"Yes, although I am afraid she doesn't give me as much credit for her success as she should," the madame replied, evidently a little nettled by the fact.

"For I understood she made the remark that she learned more during her first week in the theater than she had from me in a year."

"But it is the way with all these young hus-sies, after they get up, they despise the ladder by the aid of which they ascended."

"Yes, that is usually the case, bad 'cess to 'em!"

"Well, are you posted in regard to Miss Estelle's success; have you heard any gossip about her?"

"Oh, yes, I always hear what is going on, for I have quite a number of friends in the theater."

"They say there is a love affair between her and this young actor, Edmund Keene, who acted so unprofessionally the other day in running away without giving his manager any notice, and then, too, I understand that Judge Andy Fitzgerald, who is Billy Freehigh's backer in the Old Bowery speculation, is just mad in love with the girl."

"In regard to the first I don't know whether that is true, although I suspect it is, but as for the second, there isn't the least taste of a doubt about the matter, for I have the honor to possess the judge's confidence and I know what I am talking about."

"Judge Andy is just crazy about the girl, and what makes him worse is that she seems to be indifferent to his suit."

"Well, I can't understand that, for any actress ought to consider such a man as the judge, with all his wealth, to be a great catch."

"Yes, and the judge means honest with the girl. He wants to marry her."

"And she will not consent?"

"No, she don't see it."

"Well, she's an idiot, and in time she will be sure to repent it, for she is not likely to get another such a chance in her life!"

"That is exactly phat I think, and as the lady is blind to phat is good for her I propose to arrange the matter so that she will be obliged to marry the judge whether she likes it or not."

The madame looked astonished.

"Oh, yes, it is all very easy to say that!" she exclaimed, "but I have an idea you will not find it to be an easy matter."

"If yeess will lend me your assistance I think I can accomplish the trick," McCracken remarked, confidently.

"Ahal! and this is where the thousand dollars comes in!" the madame exclaimed, a light breaking in upon her.

"Exactly! You see it is as I told you; the business cannot be proclaimed from the house-tops, yet it is not so particularly bad afther all."

"I want you to play the part of a decoy."

"A decoy?"

"Yes, and I will so arrange it that the girl will never suspect that you knew all about the trap; it shall appear as if you were deceived, too."

"That wouldn't be so bad."

"Oh, no; your part will not be a disagreeable one, yeess will be well paid for it, and then, too, yeess can console yourself wid the thought that in reality if she knew it at the time she would not be apt to think so."

"A thousand dollars is a large sum of money," the madame remarked, evidently wavering.

"Yes, and you can make it in the easiest pos-sible manner."

"If I have been rightly informed, Miss Estelle has a great deal of influence over your son?"

"Yes, the boy fell in love with her when she used to take lessons, but she very quickly put that nonsense out of his head, and he never took it amiss, either."

"In fact, although she told him plainly that she didn't care anything for him, I believe he would do more for her than he would for me."

"Young men will act that way sometimes. Now, then, this is the scheme, and it must be worked on Sunday, too, for that is the only day that Miss Estelle is at liberty."

"You must go to her on Sunday afternoon, apparently in great distress."

"Your Billy has got into trouble and is hiding at the house of a friend a mile or so the other side of Harlem Bridge."

"Now, you have raised some money, and yeess think that if you can persuade Billy to go out West for a time the affair will blow over; you have written him to that effect, and he has re-piled that he will not go."

"You are in despair, and then, suddenly hap-pening to remember what an influence she—Miss Estelle—you understand—possesses over him, the idea came into your head to come and ask her to go with yeess to see Billy in person."

"Between the two of yeess, ye think he can be persuaded to get out."

"Oh, she will go with me; there isn't the least doubt of it!" the madame exclaimed.

"She is a good-hearted girl, and always ready to oblige."

"You can engage a coach and be driven right to the house, so yeess will be afther telling her."

"The hack business will all be arranged in ad-vance, you know, so all yeess will have to do is to get in and be driven to the place."

"The mansion is in a lonely situation, but that is natural, for a man biding from the officers would choose just such a place."

"After yeess enter the house, on your right hand you will find a parlor, the door will be open and you will conduct the girl into the room and request her to wait there while you go for your son."

"Then pass through the entry, go out of the back door, where you will find the carriage which brought you. Get into it. Under the seat you will find your thousand dollars. Ye will be driven back to the city, and that is all you will have to do."

"But what explanations will be given to the girl to screen me, for she may take it into her head to punish me afterward?"

"Oh, that will be all arranged."

"She will be told that yeess were informed that your son, being pursued by the officers, took refuge in the woods at the back of the house, and upon going there you were seized by a couple of detectives who, on the charge of having assisted your son to escape, arrested and conveyed you half-way to Harlem."

"And then, when yielding to your remon-strances, they release yeess and you come back here, yeess were informed that Miss Estelle, hav-ing grown tired of waiting, departed."

"The girl will surely be deceived."

"Will you go into the game?"

"A thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"All right; I'll accept!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SCHEME IS WORKED.

THE plan was almost as cunning a one as the brain of man could hatch, and it is no wonder that the unsuspecting girl was completely de-ceived by it, and, in her desire to be of service to the apparently distressed mother, agreed to accompany her when asked, without requiring the slightest persuasion.

All went like clock-work.

Estelle was conducted into the old-fashioned parlor and then the madame departed.

At the rear door she found the coach, got into it and then, with trembling hands examined under the cushion.

She had found so much dishonesty and cheat-ing in her pilgrimage through the world, she was apprehensive that in this case she might discover, after she had performed her part ac-cording to agreement, the plotters had tricked her as well as the girl, and that the thousand dollars might not "materialize" when she sought for it.

But the thousand dollars was there, much to the madame's joy.

The judge was too old a politician to go back on a tool, who had taken a bribe to do dirty work, and swindle the party out of the hire.

"Ahal! the thousand dollars is all right!" the madame exclaimed, as she hid the money in her bosom.

"I have kept my word and did exactly as I agreed to, so I have earned my money, although if people knew how I earned it, I am afraid they would be very apt to say that it was a very dirty piece of business."

"This Mr. McCracken is a great lawyer and has a long head, and the way he conquered my scruples was wonderful. It is the first time I

ever did anything underhand in my life, but I wanted the money so badly and I yielded to the temptation.

"And if anything should go wrong now, they can't blame me, for I have done exactly as I agreed, and of course a weak old woman like myself is no match in trickery for a great man like Mr. McCracken."

And by the time that the madame's reflections came to an end, the coach was well on its way back to the city.

Estelle, after the madame quitted the room, took a seat, prepared to patiently wait her return with the erring Billy, in regard to whose escapades she was somewhat acquainted.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed away, and as the madame did not return, Estelle began to grow impatient.

Then the girl heard footsteps in the hall.

"She has come at last," she murmured.

Imagine the girl's surprise when Judge Andy Fitzgerald entered the room, followed by the Irish lawyer, Corny McCracken.

Estelle sprung to her feet in alarm, her eyes dilating, and her bosom heaving.

"I am greatly pleased to welcome you to my house," said the judge with an elaborate bow.

The trip had been so timed that night had fallen when they reached the old mansion, but as the parlor was illuminated with a coal-oil lamp, there was plenty of light on the scene.

"Your house!" cried Estelle in horror.

"Yes, but of course, you know when you consented to elope with me, that I would bring you to my house.

"It is not quite so elegant as my mansion on the avenue, but it is quiet and retired here, and we can enjoy our honeymoon in peace, and there will not be any danger of our being disturbed by these sleuth-hound reporters, anxious to obtain the latest particulars of the great elopement case."

"In Heaven's name, what do you mean?" cried Estelle, wildly.

"Have I been entrapped?"

"Not at all! You have only yielded to my persuasions and been induced to elope with me.

"My friend here, McCracken, can bear witness to that, as also can Madame Mikella, who conducted you to my arms as per agreement.

"Both she and McCracken will tell their stories to-night, and the morning newspapers on Monday will have a full account, so that everybody will know all about the matter, and, if you are wise, and value your good name, you will not attempt to dispute the truth of the story, for if you are not married to me by to-morrow morning—and my friend here can summon a minister in a very few minutes—the world will be apt to have a very poor opinion of you, for most certainly Madame Mikella will testify that you came of your own free action, as also will the driver of the coach, and that you knew you were coming to me."

As will be seen by this statement, the plotters were not keeping faith with the tool whom they had agreed to shield.

Estelle was so astounded by this unexpected turn of affairs that, for a moment, she had difficulty in believing she had heard aright.

There must be some mistake, or, was she wandering in the mazes of a horrid dream?

But for a brief time only did she hesitate; then her indignation flamed forth.

"Oh, this is too infamous for belief!" she cried, indignantly.

"But, no; I cannot believe you really have descended to so base a trick! This is a jest—a sorry one it is true, but still only a jest. You have contrived this scheme to frighten me, and you are not in earnest."

"My dear Miss Estelle, you never made a greater mistake in your life!" the judge replied. "There is no joke about the matter: I am thoroughly in earnest. True, I have adopted a means to win you which the law would not approve, but my excuse is that I knew of no other way. You have rejected the suit I have so ardently pressed, but I am not satisfied to take no for an answer, and so, despairing of being able to win you by fair means, I have adopted this underhand method. The only excuse that I care to offer is that your beauty and goodness have inspired me with a passion which I am unable to resist. If a jury of my fellow-citizens were called to sit in judgment upon me their verdict certainly would be that I am really not responsible for my acts. For the time being I am a little cracked in the upper story—mad with love, you know."

Though the judge had spoken in a bantering manner, the young actress could see that he was thoroughly in earnest and her heart sunk when she reflected how helpless she was, now that she was completely in his power.

She had told no one where she was going when she accompanied Madame Mikella, and, as far as she could see, there was not the slightest clew for a rescuer to seize upon.

In fact, but one person in all the wide world would be apt to trouble himself in the matter and that was the young actor, Edmund Keene.

But she was not the one to yield to despair. She rallied and in excited tones cried:

"This base and unmanly trick will not be

successful! No matter if all the world thinks I have so far forgot myself as to fly in secret with you. I know that I have not done so, and in time the world at large will know the truth too!"

The judge's face darkened and he glanced at McCracken, who shook his head in a significant manner, as much as to say that extreme measures must be adopted, or else the girl's stubbornness would set at naught the cunning scheme which had been devised to entrap her.

"My dear Estelle, I do not doubt that you are going to make a desperate fight, but I can assure you that I counted the cost of this scheme before I went into it and I made up my mind to win," the judge remarked in a resolute way.

"I know perfectly well this proceeding on my part would not be sanctioned by the law, and that, in fact, I am running the risk of the State Prison by embarking in this enterprise.

"Now with this knowledge staring me in the face it is not likely I will neglect any means to make you mine and so compel you to keep silent."

"You will only have your labor for your pains!" Estelle cried, indignantly, unable to restrain her anger. "You may ruin my reputation—you may be able to make all believe that I am a foolish, guilty creature, but I know it is not the truth, and in time I am certain that the world will know it also."

"Now, my dear girl, I am going to talk to you in the frankest manner," the judge observed.

"I have taken considerable trouble to get you here—really committed a criminal offense, as I observed before, and I have made up my mind that by fair means or foul you shall be mine. I have a legal friend, a justice of the peace, who is authorized by law to perform the wedding service, and this party, in a case of this kind, to oblige such a man as myself, will be deaf to anything that you may say; any remonstrance on your part will not produce the slightest effect upon him. He will marry us, no matter how strongly you may protest."

"Oh, this is infamous!" Estelle cried in horror.

"There's an old adage, you know, 'the end justifies the means,'" Fitzgerald replied.

"I have determined that you shall be mine and I intend to accomplish my object if it costs me a fortune! Now you might as well submit quietly, for there is not a chance for you to escape."

"Mind you, most men situated as I am would not treat you as well as I propose to do. I am going to make you my wife, and there will not be a woman in all this big city who will be able to enjoy life better. Everything that money can give you can have."

Estelle's lip curled in scorn and her lithe form quivered with indignation as she listened to the words of the politician.

"Such a marriage would not be anything but a mockery!" she exclaimed. "And, despite your words, I do not believe you would dare to commit such an outrage!"

"Before you are four and twenty hours older you may have reason to change your mind in regard to that," Judge Andy replied.

"And now, I will leave you alone to meditate upon the situation for a few hours; possibly when you come to think the matter over you will come to the conclusion that it will be wise in you to accept the situation with resignation."

Then the judge and the Irishman withdrew and Estelle was left a prisoner.

The two men repaired to a room on the same floor, adjoining the one occupied by the girl.

"Well, what do you think of matters?" the judge asked with a moody brow as he helped himself to a chair.

"My dear Andy, I am not afferter liking the way the gurl goes on," McCracken replied with an air of great deliberation as he too sat down.

"I had no idea that she was such an obstinate little vixen!" Fitzgerald exclaimed.

"Upon me wourd, she is as contrary a piece of humanity as I have run across in a dog's age," the lawyer remarked.

"I calculated that when she found herself in such a trap—her reputation compromised—that she would be glad to accept any chance to get out of the scrape."

"True fer yeys! Wid nine gurls out of tin it would have worked that way, but this little devil is as obstinate as a mule!"

"Say, Corny, my boy, do you think we will be able to carry this thing through?" the judge asked, abruptly.

"Andy, me bucko, it looks mighty doubtful just now, unless we make a change in the programme."

"Yes, I think we will have to change our scheme in some way," the judge observed, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"Yis, yis, for though our fri'nd, the justice is a tough b'y'e, yet he wouldn't like to perform the marriage ceremony whin the gurl was, maybe, screeching like a wild-cat ag'in it."

"What would you suggest?"

"We will have to be afferter trying a little strategy," the Irishman replied, with a cunning chuckle.

"We must be afferter fixing her so that whin

the wedding takes place she will not be able to object."

"How can that be arranged?"

"Aisly enough; she must be drugged," the other replied.

"Molly, who has charge of the house here, is a cunning woman, and she will do just as you want her too, provided she is well paid. Lave me alone to fix a plan so that wid her aid this gurl will be put into such a condition that she can be married without being able to kick up the laste taste of a row."

"We'll have Molly in at once, and talk the matter over with her!" exclaimed Judge Andy, feeling decidedly encouraged.

CHAPTER XL.

ESTELLE'S JAILER.

AFTER the door closed behind the two men and she heard the key turn in the lock, thus showing that she was a prisoner just the same as though confined in a jail, the young actress felt sick at heart.

"Oh, it does not seem possible that it can be true," she murmured, sinking listlessly into a chair, completely unnerved by her dreadful position.

"I have read of such things in romances, but they always seemed so unnatural—so far-fetched, yet now I am in the toils of a designing villain, and my situation is fully as strange and terrible as any depicted in these works of fiction.

"Will the man dare to carry out his threat and marry me by force whether I am willing or not?" she queried.

"It does not seem possible that he would dare to commit such an outrage, and, too, it is extremely improbable that any man, authorized by law to perform the wedding ceremony, would dare to marry a woman against her will if she protested strongly against such an outrage.

"Oh, no, it is an attempt to frighten me into consenting. He thinks by working upon my fears—by threatening, that I will finally bring myself to agree to this marriage, but he will find, although I am only a weak girl, yet in such a case as this I can be as obstinate as the strongest man."

Estelle's eyes were wandering around the apartment while she was giving utterance to these reflections.

The room was nicely furnished, although the furniture was strange and old-fashioned like the house.

There were two windows shielded by heavy curtains, and the thought came to the girl that, perhaps, she might be able to escape through one of the casements, but upon examination she was discouraged to find the windows were guarded by heavy shutters upon the outside, so securely fastened that it was not possible for her to open them.

Then a door at the other end of the room from where the one was situated through which she had entered the apartment, caught her eyes.

Immediately the thought entered her mind that, possibly, she might be able to escape by means of this portal.

When she came to examine, though, Estelle was disappointed to find that it led into a small inner room, fitted up as a bedchamber.

There was no door in this apartment but the one by which the girl entered, a single window only, and this was as tightly secured as the ones in the outer room.

Estelle gazed around with a despairing look upon her face.

"Alas, I fear that it will not be possible for me to escape!" she cried, in despairing accents. "I am as much a prisoner as though confined in a dungeon."

Then the noise made by some one at the door of the outer apartment attracted her attention.

She returned to the large room just in time to meet a large, masculine-looking woman, with a decidedly Celtic face.

She nodded in the most friendly manner while her face was wreathed with smiles, there being nothing of the stern jailer about her.

"Glad to see you, my dear," she said, "and I hope you find yourself comfortable. I'm Mrs. Molloy and I am a very old friend of Judge Andy."

"And are you the mistress of this house?" the young actress asked, eagerly, for there was something in the face of the woman which inspired her with the hope that she might be able to make a friend of her.

"Yes, my dear, this is my house."

"You do not look like a wicked woman!" Estelle exclaimed, and this was indeed her impression, for although Mrs. Molloy had a masculine face, yet it was not a cruel one.

"Indeed, I should hope not!" the woman cried, as though horrified by the idea.

"No, indeed," she continued, "I try to do right and attend to my religious duties as faithfully as a woman can."

"Then you will surely aid me to escape from the snare into which I have fallen."

"Oh, yes, yes, of course," the woman remarked, in a soothing kind of way, adopting the tone that one would use to a peerish, ailing child whom it was not deemed wise to scold.

The peculiar tone astonished Estelle, and she looked at the woman in amazement.

"Do you understand the position in which I am placed?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, the judge explained it to me," replied the woman, placidly, and she beamed in true motherly fashion at the girl. "But you must not worry, you know; it will all come right in time."

"How can you speak in such a way?" Estelle exclaimed in wonder.

"Not worry and it will come all right, when I am detained here against my will and threatened with a fate which to me is as bitter as death."

"Yes, yes, but if I were you I would not trouble my mind about it. Don't worry."

Again the woman spoke in the soothing tone which seemed so strangely out of place.

Then a sudden idea came to the young actress. The woman had been deceived. Some spurious tale had been told to her, or else, surely, she would not take the matter so quietly.

With this idea Estelle questioned:

"You say you know all the particulars in regard to me?"

"Yes, yes; the judge told me."

"Have you any objections to tell me what the judge told you?" Estelle asked.

"Well, it may seem a little hard to you," the woman replied, in a hesitating way.

"Oh, no, I guess I can bear it. You seem to be an honest woman, and I am really anxious to learn how Judge Fitzgerald has explained his conduct toward me so that you are satisfied to allow such a thing to take place in your house. I presume you know that I am a prisoner here?"

"Yes, but you will be treated in the kindest manner," the woman hastened to observe.

"Oh, and because I am not to be ill-treated, do you think it is right that I should be deprived of my liberty?" Estelle demanded, indignantly.

"Well, but you must consider that it is not quite safe to allow you to go at large," the other rejoined in the most confident way.

"Not quite safe to allow me to go at large!" the young actress exclaimed, utterly amazed by the speech. "Why, in the name of all that is wonderful, is it not safe to allow me my liberty?"

"Because you are afflicted, you know."

"Afflicted?"

"Yes; not quite right in your head."

"Oh, this is too ridiculous!" Estelle exclaimed, astounded by the speech. "Is it possible that the judge has told you that I am not in my right mind?"

"Yes, of course; and that is the reason why you have been brought here. It does not really amount to anything, and in time you will be certain to get well," she was quick to add. "And I am sure you ought to feel very grateful to the judge for taking so much trouble. It is not every man who would be willing to keep his engagement to marry a woman whom he knew to be a little out of her mind."

"This is so utterly ridiculous!" the young actress exclaimed. "Do I look to you like a crazy woman?"

"Oh, I am no judge, you know, of course," the woman protested, "but you certainly do look a little wild."

"I do not doubt it, and it is no wonder that I appear so. As I said before, you look like an honest woman, and I beg you to listen to my story. You have heard the judge's tale, now hear mine."

"There isn't anything the matter with my reason. I am as sane as you are, but I am the victim of a deep-laid plot. Judge Fitzgerald has tried to gain my love and I, finding it impossible to return his affection, was obliged to reject his suit. By a cunning trick I was decoyed to this house, and when I came I had not the least idea that the judge had anything to do with the matter."

"Mr. Fitzgerald has grown desperate and determined to win me by foul means, as fair would not suffice. He has made arrangements to marry me, despite the fact that he knows I will never consent, but he intends to force me into a union. This is the truth, and if you lend your aid to the judge, you will be taking part in an atrocious crime."

The woman appeared to be completely bewildered.

"Upon my word I don't know what to think!" she murmured. "You seem to be telling the truth, and yet I never knew the judge to do anything wrong in my life."

"However upright his past life may have been, he is committing a most cruel outrage in confining me here!" Estelle exclaimed.

"Oh, my dear young lady, if it is so I would not be a party to it for a moment!" the woman declared. "But in a matter of this kind it is so easy for one to be deceived, particularly a person like myself, who knows nothing at all about it."

"Send for my friends—the manager of the theater where I am employed—the lady with whom I board—they will be able to tell you that I am not at all crazy."

"I will do better than to send for them—I will go and see them myself!" the other exclaimed, with a sudden determination.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, with a sudden change of tone, and beginning to wring her hands.

"This places me in an awful situation. Judge Fitzgerald has been one of the best friends I have ever had, and I am really in the judge's power now, for he has advanced me money, and if he should force me to pay I would be ruined."

Then she appeared to be plunged in deep thought while Estelle watched her, anxiously.

"I know what I can do!" she exclaimed, abruptly. "I can arrange the matter quietly. You can give me the addresses of these friends of yours and I will visit them; if they tell me that I have been deceived—and I fear I have—I will help you to make your escape, and arrange the matter so the judge will not know that I had anything to do with it. You must not blame me for not wanting to incur his anger, for I have a large and helpless family depending upon me."

Estelle was only too glad of a chance to escape to find any fault with the way the woman arranged the matter, and she prepared to possess her soul with patience while she waited.

CHAPTER XL.

ON THE TRACK.

THE absence of the young actress was speedily discovered.

When she did not make her appearance at the supper-table, the boarding-house mistress sent a message to her room, and when she returned with the intelligence that the girl was not in her apartment the landlady at once took the alarm.

The mysterious disappearance of the young actor, Edmund Keene, from the rival boarding-house next door, was fresh in her memory, and it was not strange that she should immediately jump to the conclusion that it was possible there might be something wrong in this case.

It was a theatrical boarding-house, as the reader will remember, some of the inmates were also members of the Old Bowery company, and when supper ended without the young actress appearing, word was immediately sent to the theater.

Again was the management of that time-honored establishment plunged into despair.

Billy Freehigh, the enterprising manager, would have torn out his hair, only he had such a scanty supply of the article that he could not well afford to spare any of it, and the stage-manager, the veteran Buster, swore in the most extravagant manner.

Luckily there was another lady who was able to take Miss Estelle's place, but this necessitated an apology to the audience.

"Owing to Miss Estelle's sudden illness Miss Blank would essay her part, throwing herself upon the indulgence of the ever-generous audience, etc., etc."

The Actor Detective, Edmund Keene, still in the disguise of the Texan general, was in the audience, and so became aware that something was the matter with the girl he loved.

Keene made it a point to visit the theater every night, for he thought it was likely that by so doing he might encounter the man of whom he was in search, Estelle being the magnet which would attract him there.

When the apology revealed to him that something had happened to the young actress, he hurried at once to her boarding-house.

He was too well acquainted with theatrical matters not to understand that the absence of a performer is always accounted for on the plea of illness, no matter what may be the real cause.

At the boarding-house he learned the truth, and immediately his apprehensions became excited.

He had no suspicion that Judge Fitzgerald had anything to do with the matter, but at once jumped to the conclusion that Estelle's absence was due to the mysterious unknown who had attempted her life on the stage of the Old Bowery Theater.

"I must seek assistance," he murmured, as he quitted the boarding-house. "This mystery is too deep and dark for me to hope to solve it without the aid of men experienced in such matters."

Straight then to Police Headquarters he went, and solicited a private interview with the chief of police.

At this time Kennedy—popularly known as "King Kennedy"—was at the head of the New York police force, an able man, though inclined to be dictatorial and overbearing, hence his nickname.

To the superintendent the young actor told his story, revealing who he was and the reason why he had assumed a disguise.

The chief agreed with Keene that it was likely the mysterious unknown, who called himself Richard Roe, was responsible for the young actress's unaccountable disappearance, and he immediately set the machinery of the Police Department at work on the case.

The superintendent was one of the old style of policemen who do not believe in publicity and so strict orders were given to keep the matter quiet, and above all the reporters of the daily newspapers, were not allowed to know anything about the matter.

All the detectives and the police captains of the various stations were notified and instructed to be on the lookout.

"It is a mighty strange affair," the chief observed with a wise shake of the head. "The girl of course, was decoyed away by means of some excuse, for from your statement it is evident that she would not have gone with this man of her own free will."

"That conclusion is undoubtedly correct for I do not think there was any one in the world whom she dreaded more than this mysterious stranger."

"And with good reason too I should say," the chief remarked.

"Well, we will do the best we can for you, and as you have acted promptly there is not much doubt we will be able to trace the party."

"It is no small job to decoy away a healthy young woman in the full possession of her senses and manage to keep her quiet.

"Of course a clever schemer might be able to work the trick so as to get the girl to go off all right; that would not be so difficult; but when it comes to detaining the girl against her will, unless she is put in some private lunatic asylum, or something of that sort, then some mighty fine work has got to come in. If a man is rich and don't care how much money he spends the job might be worked, but not otherwise."

"You have taken the thing in time though and we will be pretty certain to nab my gentleman."

With this assurance Keene departed feeling considerably more easy in his mind.

From the Police Headquarters he made his way to Broadway. He had no particular purpose in view, for under the circumstances he could do nothing but wait, and he strolled up the main thoroughfare of the great metropolis more for the purpose of killing time than anything else.

He kept his wits about him though and did not fail to closely scrutinize every one he met, particularly when he arrived in the neighborhood of the large up-town hotels, being well aware of the fact that adventurers—and in fact all men who prey upon their fellows—are attracted to such places as carrion attracts flies.

And the young actor in his "get up" of the Texan general was just the sort of man likely to attract the attention of birds of prey on the watch for victims.

Keene had never thought of this, for his only idea in promenading Broadway was to kill time, and he had assumed the disguise in order to conceal his identity.

He was somewhat amazed then, just as he was passing the Fifth Avenue Hotel, to be accosted by a well-dressed young man, with rather a "fast" look however, who greeted him in the most cordial manner.

"Hello! Why, colonel, when did you leave home?"

And the speaker held out his hand in such a "glad to see you" style that the young actor could not refrain from taking it.

"Excuse me, sah, I believe you have the advantage of me, and I am not a colonel," Keene remarked, acting his assumed character to the life.

"You don't say so!" cried the other, apparently greatly astonished. "Is it possible I have made a mistake? Haven't I the pleasure of addressing Colonel John Jackson, of Memphis, Tennessee?"

"No, sah, my name is Yellowbird. General Joseph Yellowbird, of Corpus Christi, Texas."

"Ah, excuse me, I see I have made a mistake—most wonderful resemblance! Sorry I troubled you, but I would have sworn that you were my old friend, Colonel Jackson of Memphis."

Then, with a profusion of bows, the stranger passed on.

At the time of which we write the famous "bunco" game was a new thing. The inventive genius who had devised the trick had just begun to work it, and a host of small-fry rascals had not rung the chances on it, to their own profit and to their victim's discomfiture, all over the land; so, although Edmund Keene was a man who had seen a deal of life and was anything but "green," yet he had no suspicion that there was anything wrong about the matter.

He went on his way, strolling leisurely along like a stranger enjoying the sights of the city, keeping a good lookout all the time for the mysterious unknown.

The block between Twenty-ninth street and Thirtieth was one blaze of light, owing to the theater situated in the upper end of the block, and just as the young actor reached the theater he was accosted by another well-dressed, fast-looking young man, who rushed at him with outstretched hand.

"Why, General Yellowbird, how do you do?" the stranger cried, seizing hold of Keene's hand as he spoke, and shaking it in the warmest manner.

"Upon my word you are about the last man I expected to see. How did you leave all the folks at home? Well, well, if I am not delighted to meet an old acquaintance up here in the North!"

By this time Edmund Keene had "tumbled" to the fact that there was some game afoot, to use the common word.

He knew very well that no acquaintance of General Yellowbird would ever be apt, under any circumstances, to mistake him for the general, for though he was carefully disguised and looked the character which he had assumed to the life—an elderly Southerner—yet he did not look at all like General Joe Yellowbird.

The general was fully five inches less in stature and a deal bigger around, being a stout, very portly man, and wearing a thin, stubby, iron-gray beard, which it would have been impossible to counterfeit successfully so as to pass muster in the daytime.

How the game was worked flashed upon the young actor in an instant.

The first fellow had ascertained his name by pretending to recognize him, then had told the second man, and thus enabled his pal to greet him with his correct appellation.

The young actor was just in the humor for an adventure though, and so resolved to let the man develop his game.

"Well, really, upon my word, sah, I believe you have the advantage of me," Keene said, assuming an expression befitting the situation.

"Why, don't you remember me, general?" cried the stranger, with an air of profound astonishment.

"No, sah, I really do not."

"I met you in Corpus Christi when I was down there a few years ago," the man explained. "I am a second cousin of Thomas L. Larned, President of the First National Bank of Galveston; you know him of course?"

"For a moment Edmund Keene was amazed, for Larned was the president of the Galveston bank, and what was more, General Yellowbird had an account there.

"Yes, I went down to see Colonel Tom, as we always call him in the family, and while there took a run over to Corpus Christi, where I had the pleasure of meeting you and your partner too, Mr. Jones—how is Mr. Jones, by the way?" the stranger continued, before the young actor could recover sufficiently from his amazement to reply.

"Oh, he's quite well, thank you," Keene answered, puzzling his brains to account for the man's knowledge, for that he was lying when he said he had met General Yellowbird at Corpus Christi he was sure, for if he had ever seen the old lawyer, he would never have been deceived by his (Keene's) disguise.

Although Keene, for all his shrewdness, could not solve the mystery, the explanation was a simple one.

The rascals were provided with a commercial directory, giving the names of the bank officers and the principal lawyers of the towns in the United States, and when it was ascertained by the first man what his destined victim's name was, and where he came from, it was an easy matter when the first man joined the second, who was waiting in some convenient doorway, for the two to refer to the book, discover the names of the bank men and the legal lights in the particular town, and then the second man hurried up the street on the opposite side, crossed over and encountered the destined game, calling him by name, and always pretending to be a relative of one of the bank-men. But as there wasn't a bank at Corpus Christi, the rogues had used Galveston.

The trick being worked in this way, it was no wonder that in nine cases out of ten the guileless stranger was deceived into the belief that he had really met the friendly gentleman who appeared to be so delighted to see him.

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, for although I was only in the company of your partner for a short time, yet I got the impression that he was as noble a gentleman as I ever met."

"Right you air; shake!" cried the disguised actor, wringing the hand of the other until he winced.

Keene was in for a lark, determined to see the thing through.

"Come in and have a drink somewhar," he continued, "and we will drink Baldy's health, too. You are right for a thousand dollars! Baldy Jones is one of nature's noblemen! Eighteen-karat fine and no mistake, as sure as you are born!"

CHAPTER XLII.

A DEEP GAME.

"On, I cannot allow you to stand that!" exclaimed the stranger, producing an apparently well-filled pocketbook.

"You did the honors when I was in Corpus Christi, and you must allow me to return the compliment here in New York."

And despite the disguised actor's protests the New Yorker settled the bill, but the supposed Texan squared the account by calling for another "round," which he paid for; then the pair sallied forth to the street again.

After walking on for a few steps the stranger consulted his watch.

"Just ten o'clock," he remarked, "and that reminds me that I have an appointment at ten. I took a chance in a lottery some time ago for the benefit of the Sunday-school of the church to

which I belong, and was lucky enough to win some valuable books, a couple of fine unabridged dictionaries, and if you care to take one I shall be glad to present it to you, for one, of course is all I want."

Keene knew there was some trick in this, but as he was unable to see what it was, he said he would be glad to take the book, being curious to see how the game was worked.

His companion conducted him to a small brick house a few blocks from Broadway, rung the door-bell, and while waiting to be admitted said a few words in explanation.

"This is one of the best things in New York," he remarked. "This is an association for the aid of poor churches, Sunday-schools and the like. You know how human nature is; you can get ten dollars out of a man in a lottery when he will not be willing to give ten cents for charity.

"This concern raises money by the means of lotteries, and then distributes the profits among poor churches and other good works."

"A big idea!" exclaimed Keene, who thought this was the best illustration of the old saying, "Stealing the livery of heaven to serve the devil in," that had ever come under his notice.

"I never miss the few dollars that I invest," the adventurer said in an off-hand way and with the air of a prince.

"Of course—certainly not! 'He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the lord,'" quoted the young actor.

"Exactly, 'cast your bread upon the waters and it will be returned,'" responded the other, who was evidently a well-educated young man.

"And, really, do you know, there seems to be a great deal of truth in the saying. I have been repaid a hundred-fold for every cent I have put into the thing. For instance, for one dollar I won these two books worth fifteen or twenty apiece."

"Well, that is a big return for the investment."

"Yes, and the best of the thing is that it is going on all the time. You don't have to wait either for a certain day to find out how you are going to come out like other lotteries. You pay over your money and they tell you in ten minutes whether you have made a hit or not."

"That is quick work!"

The opening of the door and the appearance of a benevolent-looking, old, white-headed gentleman interrupted the conversation at this point.

He recognized the young man and greeted him cordially.

"I thought I would drop in and get n.y books deacon," the applicant for admission remarked.

"Yes, yes, glad to see you."

Then the young man introduced the Texan to the deacon."

"Yes, yes, I am extremely delighted to make your acquaintance!" the old gentleman declared as he shook the Actor Detective's hand.

"Some of the happiest days of my life have been spent in Texas."

"The general is from Corpus Christi!" the young man interjected."

"Ah, yes, I have been there—fine town—whole-souled people—I am always overjoyed to meet a citizen of Corpus Christi," and the old gentleman shook the hand of the supposed Texan again.

Keene responded in a suitable manner and then the party entered the house.

The 'deacon' conducted the pair to a back-room on the first floor, which was fitted up like an office.

"Across one end of it was a high wooden partition behind which was a large desk with so high a back that when a man went to it he was hidden from view.

"A gate in the partition gave admission to the inclosed space, and there was a window with a shelf similar to the ones in use in banks.

The old gentleman went through the door and then disappeared from view behind the desk.

In a moment he appeared with two huge dictionaries which he placed upon the window-shelf.

"There are the books and if you will wait a moment I can tell you how your last investment turned out."

"Oh, yes, that ten dollars to help that church in Indianola build a new parsonage for the minister. By the by, that is in your State, general."

The Actor Detective nodded. He had become very much interested in this novel swindling scheme, by far the cleverest of any dodge of the kind that had ever come under his notice.

The old man disappeared again behind the desk, and the young one carried the books to a table that stood in the center of the room and placing the volumes upon it pushed one over to the actor.

"There, when you go back to Texas you can carry that with you and just tell your partner, Jones, that you got it from Chris. Larned. I do not doubt he will remember me, for we had a jolly time together at Corpus Christi."

"Oh, yes, I will be sure to tell the colonel all about you, for I know he will appreciate the story."

"You are in luck!" cried the old gentleman at this moment making his appearance, and as he spoke he placed a big roll of bills upon the window counter.

"Your premium is two hundred dollars."

"Hello, hello!" cried the young man, appearing to be excessively delighted, "two hundred dollars, eh?"

"Yes, that is the sum, and he straightened the bills with a flourish.

"Well, well, that is a big return for a ten dollar investment."

"Yes, but see what you would have got if you had invested a hundred as I wanted you to—a small fortune, eh?"

By this time Keene thought he saw how the scheme worked.

The idea of all this humbug was to induce the stranger, introduced by the "roper-in"—which the young man evidently was—to take a chance in the "church" lottery.

"Yes, yes, I am sorry I didn't, for I am always lucky."

"Yes, and I notice, too, that you never introduce a friend here without he strikes a rich prize if he follows your advice."

The Actor Detective, of course, had assumed to be intensely interested in all this nonsense, and when this declaration was made he nodded as if he believed every word.

"Yes, that is true; do you remember that acquaintance from New Orleans who put in a hundred dollars and got away with two thousand?"

"Oh, certainly, and he was the most delighted man I think that I ever saw. By the way, there are some big drawings coming off to-night. Will you invest?"

"You bet I will!" and the young man counted out a hundred dollars from the roll and pushed it over the counter.

"There, I will go that much. What is it for?"

"To build a new church at San Antonio, Texas."

"Hello! why that is just down in your State, general; I guess you will have to invest in that, eh, to help them along?"

"Well, no, I reckon you will have to excuse me," the disguised actor remarked, curious to see how the sharpers would work the game when they got hold of a man who could not be induced to go into it.

"It is possible that the general hasn't any money with him," the young man insinuated. "I just happened to meet the general by accident on Broadway, out for a stroll, you know, and of course he had no idea that he would need any money."

Keene understood the idea of this speech. It was skillfully designed to draw forth from him a declaration in regard to his financial standing.

And he answered as a gay, old Texan general, rolling in wealth, would have replied:

"Well, now, gents, you kin jest bet your bottom dollar that you never catch a coon of my size without the solid stuff in his pockets!" And he slapped his thigh emphatically as he spoke.

He was watching the faces of the pals narrowly as he made the declaration although he did not allow them to perceive it, and he saw their eyes gleam with cupidity as he boasted of his wealth.

"Never mind pulling your money out, general!" the young man cried, with a lordly air. "Let me put up for you this time, and if you don't win it is all right, I'll stand the loss."

The proposition certainly seemed fair enough and Keene nodded assent.

"All right—go it."

The young man pushed over the other hundred, the "deacon" took the bills and retired behind the desk.

Then a click, click sounded through the room as though a telegraph was in motion.

In about five minutes the old man appeared at the counter with his hands full of bills.

"You have struck it again!" he exclaimed, "but not so heavily as before, the gain this time is two to one, two hundred dollars for each one hundred invested, but the supplementary drawing takes place immediately and if you invest this cash you may strike it ten to one!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

DESPERATE WORK.

"Oh, of course we will go it! That is the kind of men we are!" the young man exclaimed.

"There is a heap of sporting blood in our veins, eh, general?"

"Yes, yes, we are game to the backbone!" Keene replied.

But as he spoke he was puzzling his brain over the question of how the sharpers were going to make any money out of this game.

They were taking a good deal of trouble, but as yet the Actor Detective did not see how they were going to plunder the victim.

"We will invest the whole amount, eh, general?" the young man continued.

"Oh, yes, we will go it!" Keene remarked, with a true Texan flourish.

He was acting in the matter as prudently as the most careful man could advise. He was not risking a cent of his own money, and as long as the cash belonged to somebody else, no one could blame him for being willing to "invest" it.

"Oh, we are bloods all the way through!" the

young man declared, as he pushed the money over to the old gentleman.

"I have no doubt that you will strike it ten to one this time!" the "deacon" asserted. "And if you each succeed in getting two thousand dollars apiece, you may feel well satisfied with your night's work."

"Well, you may be sure that I shall not growl, eh, general?" and the young man winked at the disguised detective.

"Oh, no, we will not growl, either one of us. There's nothing mean 'bout gentlemen of our kidney!" Keene exclaimed.

"Of course there's a little risk in these supplementary drawings, but then that is where the old saying comes in, nothing venture nothing win."

And after this wise observation the old gentleman retreated behind the desk, and the click, click of the supposed telegraph began again.

"A little risk," muttered Keene to himself. "Aha! the game is developing! Now they are preparing to make their strike."

Then he turned to the roper-in and said, with the most innocent air possible:

"What did the deacon mean by saying there was some risk?"

"Well, that is where the funds necessary to run this scheme come from," the other answered with the utmost readiness.

"It takes money to make the mare go, and, of course, a thing of this kind cannot be carried out without cash."

"On these supplementary drawings a man stands a chance to make ten for one if he makes a strike. If he gets a blank he merely loses what he puts up, but if he is unfortunate enough to get a double blank, then he is held for ten times the amount of his original investment."

Keen pretended to be vastly astonished at this, and gave vent to a low whistle.

"Oh, you need not be alarmed; there is not much chance of our striking a double blank, for there's only one in every thousand chances."

"Yes, yes, I see."

The click, click of the telegraph stopped and the old gentleman made his appearance at the window, but this time his hands were not full of bank bills, and his face wore a serious expression.

Upon the counter he laid two pieces of paper which looked like checks.

"I am sorry, gentlemen, but you have both drawn double blanks which will cost you two thousand apiece."

"Oh, well, a man cannot hope to strike it rich always!" the young man exclaimed, carelessly. "I have been playing now for a month and am over ten thousand dollars ahead, so I can amply afford to let you have two thousand back. I'll just give you my check for the amount."

"How are you fixed, general?" he asked, turning to the supposed Texan.

"I presume you are not carrying around so large a sum as two thousand dollars in your pocket."

"No, I reckon not by a jugful!"

"Well, you can give the deacon what money you have and draw out a check for the balance. I will guarantee that the general's check will be good for all the money he draws it for!" he added, addressing the old man.

Keene could not help bursting into a hearty laugh, for the impudence of the fellow amused him.

"Ha, ha, ha," he laughed, "and so you want to take a leetle two thousand dollars out of me?" he exclaimed.

"Well, you honestly lost it, you know; it is a debt of honor; and among gentlemen all such debts must be paid if it takes a leg!" exclaimed the young man, loftily.

"You won the two hundred, you know, and as long as you were willing to take the winnings you surely will not object to meet the losses."

"It is all right, deacon," he continued, turning to the old gentleman, in a confidential way.

"The general does not exactly understand the thing, but now that I have explained the matter to him the general is too much of a gentleman to want to get out of paying a debt of honor."

"Oh, I know the general is all right," the other responded in the most oily way, "and I should be willing to take his check for any amount although he is a stranger to me."

"Oh, no, you can't play this rifle on me!" Keene exclaimed.

"I knew you were up to some game right from the beginning, but as it was a new thing to me I thought I would let you go on for I was curious to see how you worked the trick, but nary two thousand dollars—or two thousand cents, either, for that matter—do you get out of me."

"Do you mean to accuse us of being swindlers?" cried the young man, indignantly.

"Right you are—that is the gait I am striking!"

"You shall answer for that insult with your heart's blood!" and the speaker thrust his hand behind him as if to draw a weapon from his pistol-pocket.

"Hold on—hold on, my dear William!" cried the old gentleman, coming from behind the railing. "The general does not mean to be ugly."

He will pay the two thousand all right if you do not irritate him. No gentleman, you know, likes to be forced."

"Nary pay, you pair of precious beats!" replied the Actor Detective, defiantly.

Out came the pistol of the young man, and the old gentleman too drew a revolver, but quick as they were, Edmund Keene was quicker still.

He had his revolver in the waistband of his pantaloons, concealed by his vest, and it only took a second for him to produce it.

It is not an easy matter to get "the drop" on a man "raised" in Texas, as the young actor had been.

"Go slow—go slow, or I will bore a hole through you fellows!" the Actor Detective warned.

None of the pistols were cocked and the young man, noting this circumstance, cried:

"You will have to raise the hammer of your revolver first."

"No, I will not. This is a new tool, and one that comes in mighty handy in a picnic of this kind. This is a self-cocking revolver—a single pull raises the hammer and lets her go, and if you two make the slightest movement to commence hostilities I will be obliged to lay you out, instanter!"

The baffled conspirators glared in rage at the speaker, but they were fairly caught and neither one dared to make a movement.

But they were cunning scoundrels though and had a trick in reserve that Edmund Keene little suspected.

The young actor was standing in front of the window in the railing and about a yard away from it.

Suddenly, without the least warning, the floor opened beneath his feet, and down into the depths below he disappeared.

The actor had gone through many stage "traps" in the course of his theatrical experience, but this was as effective as any of them.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DECOY REPENTS.

WE will now return to Madame Mikella whom we left in the coach, proceeding homeward.

After she possessed herself of the thousand dollars, satisfied herself that Judge Fitzgerald had kept faith with her and there was no mistake about the money, she amused herself with thinking of how she could use the money so as to start her wayward son in some good business, but after she was in her own apartments and had safely hidden the money away, her conscience began to trouble her.

"Suppose my boy was a girl and some rich man played such a trick upon her as Judge Fitzgerald has played upon Estelle, what would I think about the matter?" she queried.

"Ah, me, I believe I could find it in my heart to kill him without mercy!"

"Suppose I bring the matter still closer to myself," she continued, thoughtfully. "Suppose that at the time when Keller was courting me some rich man had taken a fancy to me and made up his mind to carry me off, just as Estelle has been abducted. Would the fact that the man had plenty of money, and was willing to marry me, make me satisfied to accept him?"

"Well, I guess it would not, and yet I allowed that cunning Irishman to persuade me that I was really aiding Estelle to obtain a good husband, and was doing the girl a service by going into the scheme."

"Oh, dear, I am afraid I have been a very wicked woman for allowing that Irish rascal to get me to act as Judge Fitzgerald's tool!"

And the madame, rising to her feet, began to pace restlessly up and down the room, wringing her hands.

"I have always been an honest woman all my life, and never did anything out of the way until this rascal persuaded me into this scheme."

"Oh, I was such a fool to allow the money to tempt me! I have just ruined Estelle's life!"

"Now that I come to reflect about the matter I can understand just exactly how she will feel about it. For my part, I would rather be dead than married to a man under such circumstances as these, no matter if he was worth all the money in the world."

"A woman can be happy with the man she loves, even if they have not much money, but she cannot be happy with a man whom she does not love, even if he is a millionaire."

"I would like to help that poor girl out of the scrape into which I have got her, and yet I don't want to get myself into trouble, and I am anxious to hold on to the thousand dollars, too."

She sat down and reflected upon the matter for a while, and then a bright idea occurred to her.

"I have it!" she exclaimed. "I will write a letter to the superintendent of police—write it in a disguised hand—and tell him that Miss Estelle, the young actress, has been abducted and is a prisoner, and I can describe the way to get to the house, so the police will be sure to find it."

"The judge may suspect that I had a hand in the matter, but he will not be able to prove it,

and he cannot do me any harm, anyway, but at all risks I must try and get the girl out of the scrape."

Having come to this conclusion, Madame Mikella proceeded to write the letter.

She wrote a bold, masculine hand, totally unlike a lady's handwriting, and being expert with the pen, had no difficulty in disguising her hand so that no one should be able to recognize it.

Placing the letter in an envelope and addressing it to the chief of police, she went out and deposited the missive in the letter-box on the corner of the street.

She had used a sheet of foolscap paper, with the idea that no one would be apt to think a woman would use a sheet of that sort, and she had inclosed it in a rather small, common envelope, and the result was that the letter presented a bulky appearance.

There were a couple of half-grown boys standing in a doorway on the corner, and they noticed the "fatness" of the letter when Madame Mikella slipped it into the box.

These boys were some of the young toughs whom the police assert give them more trouble than the men ruffians of the city.

"Say, rocks," quoth one, after Madame Mikella disappeared in the distance, "did yer git yer peepers on dat letter?"

"You bet yer life I did."

"Did yer see how fat it was?"

"Oh, I did!"

"Mebbe the old dame is a-sending money to some bloke. If we had a wire mebbe we could collar der boddle!"

The idea struck the other as being an exceedingly good one and he expressed himself to that effect.

It was a lonely corner, away up-town, and at this hour there were few passers-by, so the young toughs were able to pursue their researches with little danger of being disturbed.

"Oh, rocks, if here ain't a piece of luck!" exclaimed the first speaker as he peered into the letter-box.

"Wot is it?"

"Der letter is stuck inside, and I bet yer I kin git it out wid a stick!"

The implement was soon found, and as the young rascal predicted the letter was easily extracted from the box.

The scamp tore it open without the least hesitation, and his disgust was great, when he made the discovery that there was no money in it.

"Dis yere is a sell!" he cried.

"Bet yer life!" responded the other.

And then, in order to destroy the evidence of their crime, the letter was thrust down the sewer entrance.

Fate itself seemingly had entered the lists to prevent Estelle from escaping from the cruel snare into which she had fallen.

CHAPTER XLV.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

THE old gentleman, the "deacon," had pressed a spring in the floor which worked a bolt connected with the trap, and after the supposed Texan general had disappeared through the hole the pair of rascals rushed to the edge of the trap-door and peered down into the darkness, listening intently.

It was a deep cellar, fully twelve feet from the trap-door to the hard earth beneath, and none of the victims who had been unceremoniously hurled through the trap had escaped being stunned by the fall.

"I reckon this will settle this Texan fire-eater!" the old man exclaimed with a chuckle.

"Yes, if it has not laid him out he must be a tough old rooster," the other responded.

Then to their listening ears came the sound of faint groans.

"Hello, general, are you hurt?" the young rogue asked, through the trap-door.

But the Texan had evidently been stunned by the fall, for he replied not.

"I will go down and go through him," the young man said. "Take away his weapons and relieve him of whatever cold cash he has about his person, and if he isn't badly hurt we will hold on to him until he makes up his mind to give us a good-sized check."

"All right; I will be at the speaking-tube and you can let me know how he is. If he needs a doctor we will have to get him to the hospital as soon as possible, and then make ourselves scarce."

"All right."

The young man then descended to the underground region, taking along with him a bull's-eye lantern, for the old gentleman closed the trap as his confederate left the room.

When the fellow entered the cellar and flashed the light of the lantern upon the man who had been disposed of so unceremoniously, he found that he was laying all in a heap.

"No wonder that it knocked the sense out of him," the rascal observed, as he placed the lantern upon the earth and then advanced toward the senseless man.

"It was a nasty fall!" exclaimed the Actor Detective, suddenly rising to a sitting posture and

"covering" the astonished confidence man with his revolver.

"A nasty fall, I repeat, but as I happen to be used to going through traps and know how to brace myself, it did not lay me out, as you and your pal calculated."

In truth, Keene had not suffered in the least from his unexpected fall.

As he said, he was accustomed to these sudden descents, and knew how to adjust himself so as to break the force of the shock.

He had lost his hat and wig, however, and so stood revealed in his own proper person, and the young man recognized him immediately.

"Edmund Keene!" he cried, in astonishment.

"Hello, you know me, eh?"

"Oh, yes, but I did not recognize you in your disguise."

"I am doing a little detective work. I may be called the Actor Detective, now, I suppose, and so this capture of you is right in my new line."

"Are you going to give me up?" the fellow queried, nervously.

"That is my little game, I guess."

"Hold on, perhaps I can make a bargain with you."

"I think not."

"My name is Keller, William Keller, and I am the son of Madame Mikella."

"Ah, yes, I have heard of you; I knew you were wild, but I did not think you were as bad as all this."

"For my mother's sake, give me a chance!" the man pleaded. "I will turn over a new leaf—I swear I will!"

Keene hesitated; for the sake of the old actress he hated to give her son to justice.

"Come with me to your mother and I'll see what she has to say about it," he said, at last.

An hour later the pair stood in the presence of the actress-maker.

And now we must return again to Estelle.

Thinking she had gained the confidence of the imprisoned girl, Mrs. Molloy endeavored to get her to partake of some refreshment, but Estelle declined, for, as she said, she had no appetite, and when the woman became so earnest about the matter, her suspicions were excited, and she stated decidedly that she would neither eat nor drink while she was in the house.

This was reported to the judge and he, advised by McCracken, determined to force the girl to drink the wine which was drugged.

The two men came into the room and the judge told her plainly that if she did not drink he would force the liquor down her throat.

"I am not going to have you kill yourself while under my care!" he declared. "You need nourishment and you must take a glass of wine at least!"

At this critical moment the door opened suddenly and the Actor Detective, Edmund Keene, made his appearance to the extreme surprise and consternation of the conspirators.

Rescue at last had come, and the young actress, with a cry of joy, flung herself upon the actor's breast, while the judge and the Irishman looked as if they wished the floor would open and swallow them.

"Don't be alarmed, it's all right now; you are perfectly safe," Keene said.

"And I say, judge, don't try this sort of thing again, for better men than you have gone up the river for it."

"For God's sake! say it's a joke, or we're both booked for Sing Sing!" cried the Irishman, in the judge's ear.

Feeling that he was in a trap the judge stammered forth an excuse—it was all a jest—he meant the lady no harm, and would have shortly taken her home.

For Estelle's sake, whose good name would be sure to suffer in the case of an exposure, Keene forbore to take any further action, contenting himself with retreating with the girl.

"I'll go bail the madame is at the bottom of it!" McCracken exclaimed. "I mistrusted her from the first that she yielded too easily!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE LOST HEIR.

A few more words of explanation and our task is done.

The Actor Detective, in half a dozen excellent disguises, sought high and low through New York for the young man who called himself Richard Roe, but as that party was in Texas, as the reader is aware, the search came to naught.

Finally, convinced that he would not be able to discover the whereabouts of the man upon whose head he desired to pour out the vials of his wrath, he adopted another course.

He threw off his disguise and resumed his old position upon the stage of the Old Bowery Theater, much to the delight of the manager and the satisfaction of the audience.

His idea was to lure his enemy from his retreat to attack him.

He believed that when the young scoundrel discovered that his murderous bullet had failed in its purpose, and the actor had escaped the

death so carefully planned, he would attempt to complete the work, and so allow Keene to obtain a chance at him.

But the young actor was disappointed in this; no one troubled him, and for a good reason.

A man must have an extraordinarily long arm to strike clear from Texas to New York.

The solution of the mystery came at last, though.

Colonel Baldy Jones suddenly made his appearance in New York, coming clear from his home in the Lone Star State for the express purpose of acquainting his *protege* with the strange events that had occurred at Corpus Christi.

"You can't write about such things, you know," he explained after he had finished his recital.

"By my halidom! I had to bore the scoundrel through the midriff!" he exclaimed.

"He had a pair of self-cocking six-shooters, and if I hadn't got the drop on him, I've no doubt that he would have plugged my durned ole hide as full of holes as the top of a pepper-box.

"But 'thrice is he armed that bath his quarrel just,' and a self-cocking ounce-ball derringer down in a man's pocket comes in handy sometimes."

One of the principal reasons for the colonel's visit to the metropolis was to try and discover, if it was possible, the missing heir to the great Fitzgerald property, for he did not in the least doubt that the adventurer spoke the truth when he declared he had found the girl, and as he had come directly from New York, the acute lawyer suspected that the long-lost girl must be in the city.

The police were employed, advertisements inserted in all the principal papers, and even all the private detectives called into the case.

The search was a fruitless one, though, for not the slightest trace of the girl could be discovered.

Time passed on, and with the lapse of weeks came the general from his foreign tour.

And when he had heard the strange history of what had taken place during his absence, he was much amazed.

To his partner he said, after the recital was finished, and the two old cronies sat alone together:

"I don't wonder that you made that mistake about Edmund, but you were barking up the wrong tree."

"It was on my return from my visit to Mrs. Fitzgerald number one, that I fell in with the boy."

"He was in a tight place. His father and mother, emigrants, were passing down along the coast.

"Stolen horses were found in their possession, and Edmund's father was strung up to a tree by the order of Judge Lynch, and the shock killed his mother.

"I took the babe, determined to care for it, but I didn't say anything to anybody about the circumstances, for I didn't want the boy to grow up with the stigma attached to him of being the child of a man hung for horse-stealing."

"About five years afterward it was discovered that the victim was innocent, the real culprit confessing, at the point of death, that he stole the beasts, and sold them to Edmund's father. But I didn't say anything about it, as I couldn't see that any good would come from raking up the matter."

In order to put a stop to Judge Andy's attentions, the engagement of Keene and Estelle was announced, and in disgust he immediately proposed to Miss Flynn, who had a tidy fortune and the temper of a wildcat.

The judge believed he was a mighty warrior until he got married, but his wife soon caused him to change his mind.

Edmund and Estelle's wedding was fixed to occur on the night of her twenty-first birthday, and on the morning of that day, in accordance with her mother's command, the sealed packet was opened, the old lawyer, who had become very fond of the girl, being present to give her counsel if needed.

Judge of the surprise of all when it was discovered that she was the lost heir, the girl who could justly claim the millions of the dead cattle-king.

The stage saw Miss Estelle no more, although after his marriage Edmund still continued to practice his profession, and now as a Shakespearean star stands second to none in America, much to the delight of Colonel Baldy Jones, who always declares that he predicted it would be so; and now, our tale being told, we'll say, as the old lawyer, the ardent admirer of Sweet Will, would be apt to quote:

"A kind good-night to all."

THE END.

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222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
299 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
298 Lgger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

14 Thayendanegea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle.
16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.
18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.
61 Captain Seawall, the Privateer.
111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
270 Andros the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter.
361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Blood-hound.
297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
385 Will Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
415 Hot Heart, the Defective Spy.
427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
437 Deep Duke, the Silent Sleuth.
442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.

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53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of Deadwood City.
87 The Scarlet Captain; or, Prisoner of the Tower.
106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glingal.

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1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister.
4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
51 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
114 The Gentleman from Pike.
171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport.
338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
401 Silver Sid; or, A "Baisy" Bluff.
431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibuta John's Jubilee.
422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pine.
452 Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective.
432 The Giant Horseman.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.
31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightnin'.
32 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
35 Kentuck the Sport; or, Dick Falbot of the Mines.
36 Injun Dick; or, The Death Shot of Shasta.
38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N.Y.
49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
101 The Man from New York.
107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
130 Captain Volcano; or, The Man of Red Revolvers.
161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
320 The Gentle Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
364 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
363 Crowningshield, the Sleuth; or, Pitiless as Death.
370 The Dusty Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
391 Jake Scott, the Decoy Detective.
408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
440 The High Horse of the Pacific.

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